



December 3, 2020

Re: Access to clean drinking water

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Earlier this week, your government announced that it would not meet its commitment to Indigenous peoples in Canada to ensure that every community has access to clean drinking water, and your own 2015 election commitment to end all boil water advisories by spring 2021.

The Alliance for Healthier Communities stands in solidarity with Indigenous peoples across Canada and demands urgent action from you and the federal government to ensure access to clean drinking water in all First Nations and Inuit communities. What we mean by urgent action:

1. The federal government makes all investments needed and takes swift action to lift all drinking water advisories across the country;
2. Canada's federal leaders take policy steps that transfer greater control over water to First Nations to support Indigenous peoples' rights to self-government and self-determination and to ensure long-term, sustainable safe water supply in their communities

The end result must be that all First Nations and Inuit communities have sustained access to clean drinking water now and in the future.

Last month, Neskantaga First Nation was reported on widely in the news when the entire community was forced to evacuate their homes because of contamination to their water reservoir. This story is one of the many examples of ongoing devastating impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities in Canada. As you're aware, the emergency situation in Neskantaga First Nation is not new, Prime Minister. This community in northwestern Ontario has been living under a boil water advisory for the past 25 years. It is one of many Indigenous communities across Turtle Island that lacks access to a basic commodity many people take for granted. According to the [Council of Canadians](#), at any given time there are more than 100 water advisories in First Nations across Canada.

The Alliance for Healthier Communities and its membership of 100-plus comprehensive primary health care organizations know that safe, clean water is vital to maintaining good health and wellbeing. This has been especially true during the COVID-19 crisis when clean water and sanitation are essential to preventing the spread of the virus. **Lack of access to clean drinking**

water in First Nations and Inuit communities is a violation of the United Nations’ recognized human rights and of Indigenous peoples’ rights. It is also a public health crisis. With COVID-19 cases on the rise, access to clean water in all First Nations and Inuit communities is essential to dealing with the pandemic, and it is crucial to a healthy recovery in every community.

Prime Minister Trudeau, in 2015, you promised to eliminate all long-term drinking water advisories by March 2021. According to [the Government of Canada website](#), 97 advisories have been lifted since 2015, with 59 water advisories still remaining in place. That number does not include short-term and medium-term water advisories.

We acknowledge that the [Fall Economic Statement](#) includes additional investments in water and wastewater infrastructure in First Nation communities. But this is not enough, especially after another broken commitment. We are disappointed by the federal government’s announcement that [it will not meet its promise](#) and concerned that there is no indication of when all water advisories will be lifted. Now is not the time for more small steps. Now is the time for bold action. Your government’s continued lack of urgency to ensure the upholding of a fundamental human right would be unacceptable in other communities in Canada, and considered a failure of federal leadership.

We urgently call on you and your government to keep its promises to Indigenous peoples in Canada and accelerate the work to bring clean drinking water to all First Nation and Inuit communities. It is imperative that you hold yourself and your Cabinet colleagues accountable to this essential reconciliation promise, and that the government release a clear plan and timelines for how it will prioritize the work and ensure all First Nations and Inuit communities have access to long-term, sustainable, and safe water supplies in 2021. To delay this work longer is simply unacceptable.

As you and other federal government leaders have stated many times yourselves in Parliament and directly to people through the media, ensuring clean water is an essential, foundational step toward reconciliation and addressing the impacts of Canada’s legacy of colonialism, as well as key to upholding the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The time has come to keep your word. Lives depend on it.

Sincerely,



Liben Gebremikael, Chair of the Board, Alliance for Healthier Communities