

The image features a white background with several water droplets and splashes. At the top, there are two large, teardrop-shaped droplets falling. Below them, a larger, more complex splash of water is shown, with multiple smaller droplets trailing behind it. In the lower half of the page, there are several smaller, scattered droplets of varying sizes. The overall aesthetic is clean and minimalist, focusing on the natural movement of water.

Water for All

A report by the Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco

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Our unhoused neighbors who took part in the survey and shared their experiences

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Executive Summary

Throughout the past year, one theme has continually been touched upon in the Coalition on Homelessness' street outreach: unhoused San Franciscans are in desperate need of clean water, and there aren't enough places to get it. This is a problem that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, as there has long been a shortage of restrooms, showers, and sources of potable water accessible to unhoused people. The pandemic has intensified the situation, taking from a severe human rights crisis into a deadly one. On the one hand, access to hygiene and sanitation access has become even more essential for unhoused people to protect themselves from a devastating virus. On the other hand, the restrictions imposed to slow the spread of COVID-19 greatly limit access to several of the sources of water that were previously available to the public.

In response to the frequency with which the issue of water access was being mentioned in outreach, the Coalition's Human Rights Workgroup began focusing more directly on this topic. This led to the creation and administration of the survey contained in this report. This survey was informed by international standards of water and sanitation access established by entities such as the United Nations.

The results of the survey highlight the extent to which water access is a problem in San Francisco, with 68% of respondents facing barriers to accessing their daily water needs. A majority of respondents (60%), don't have access to even 15 liters of water per day, which is the lowest international minimum standard for water access. 74% accessed less than 50 liters of water per day, which is the urban minimum standard. These barriers greatly diminish the water consumption of respondents, with only 18% using more than 9 liters daily, compared to the over 155 liters consumed by the

average San Franciscan, and the 310 liters consumed by the average Californian. The survey results also partially illuminate who is most impacted by the lack of access. Reflecting the disproportionate impacts of homelessness in San Francisco, survey respondents were more often Black, elderly, and disabled.

Based on both the results of the survey and continued outreach with unhoused San Franciscans, the Human Rights Workgroup has also included in this report a list of recommendations to address this issue in the short, medium, and long term. Because homelessness is the primary barrier to water access in San Francisco, the most effective long term solution to this crisis is to ensure stable and permanent housing for all of San Francisco's residents with adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. In the medium and short terms, the city must expand its commitment to investing in the water infrastructure necessary to provide accessible, potable drinking water for all of its residents. The city has made efforts in doing so, implementing 12 new water sources, but they must be greatly expanded upon in order to approach an adequate standard of water access for unhoused San Franciscans. The Human Rights Workgroup recommends this to begin immediately, with an additional three permanent water stations in the Tenderloin. Implementation of this and all future water infrastructure should be shaped by input from directly impacted people. This is modeled in the survey, where respondents were asked several questions regarding where and how the city should invest in water resources. Determining solutions based on this type of input will ensure that water access points will be located where they are needed most, with the features that are most helpful to those that are currently in need of increased water access.



Context

Water as a Human Right



In 2010, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council recognized the access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right and as part of international law (*Human Rights*, 2021). This mandate requires that “drinking water and water for personal and domestic usage as well as sanitation and hygiene facilities are available, accessible, safe, acceptable, and affordable for all without discrimination” (*About the human rights to water and sanitation*, n.d.). The ideal of equal access to water being a global human right is also reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the UN and agreed to by the United States in 2015, which established “available and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” as its sixth goal (*The 17 Goals*, n.d.).

In 2012, California became the first state in the United States (U.S.) to legislatively recognize the human right to water when Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. signed Assembly Bill (AB) 685. California’s current Water Code (Section 106.3) clearly states that California recognizes that “every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.” The human right to water extends to all Californians, including disadvantaged individuals regardless of their housing status (*Human Right to Water*, 2021).

In wealthy countries such as the United States (U.S.), there exist more than enough resources to provide water and sanitation services for all residents. Even so, these resources have not been made equally available, and marginalized communities have historically been denied the right of water access in various ways. This is especially true for the millions of unhoused people in the U.S. who, as acknowledged by UN Special

Rapporteur Catarina de Albuquerque after her 2011 mission to the U.S., face several barriers to accessing water and sanitation services. (de Albuquerque, 2011, p. 13-15)

The standards for what qualifies as adequate access to water and sanitation varies greatly based on context and availability (“Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion,” 2018). As a baseline, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has established a set of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) standards for establishing WASH access amongst refugees (*UNHCR WASH Manual: Programme Guidance*, 2020, pp. 53–54). The UNHCR’s WASH standards mandate that every individual has access to a minimum of 20 liters of safe water per day. In order to achieve this, the guidelines also mandate that no more than 100 people share one working water faucet, and that no more than 20 people share one toilet or shower. The international Sphere handbook on WASH access uses a slightly lower standard of 15 liters of water per day (“Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion,” 2018). However, the international Sphere community, which sets standards for humanitarian action and promotes quality and accountability, clarifies that this standard is only applicable to emergency situations, and cannot be applied to prolonged periods of time. A much higher standard of 50 liters per person is used by Sphere in “an urban middle income context.” This urban standard is seemingly much more applicable to San Francisco, although it still falls far below the 155 liters (41 gallons) of water consumed by the average San Franciscan (*The Economic Value of Water in United States’ Metropolitan Statistical Areas*, 2017).



The United States, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, must ensure that everyone, without discrimination, has physical and economic access, in all spheres of life, to sanitation which is safe, hygienic, secure, socially and culturally acceptable, and which provides privacy and ensures dignity. An immediate, interim solution is to ensure access to restrooms facilities in public places, including during the night. The long-term solution to homelessness must be to ensure adequate housing.


Catarina de Albuquerque
United Nations Special Rapporteur on Water and Sanitation

Water Access in San Francisco

By several accounts, the thousands of unhoused residents in San Francisco have barriers to accessing water and sanitation that cause their water consumption to fall far below that of the average San Franciscan and below the aforementioned international standards. For example, the city's 2020 Tenderloin Neighborhood Safety Assessment and Plan for COVID-19 reported inadequate access to drinking water and restroom facilities, or showers on almost every block surveyed (Health Streets Operations Center, 2020). Similar findings were reported in the Mission Neighborhood Plan, whose "recommended interventions" included increasing access to potable water, restrooms, and showers. These barriers, primarily caused by a historical lack of access to affordable housing, have been exacerbated by San Francisco's failure to provide reliable and consistent public access points for drinking water, showers, and restrooms.

As reported in several articles in the San Francisco Public Press, this failure can be partly attributed to mismanagement of the water resources currently available (Howey, 2020a, Howey, 2020b). However, much of the problem can be explained by lack of resources altogether. According to the Public Utilities Commission's count, there are currently 55 public sources of drinking water in San Francisco (*Drink Tap Water*, n.d.). According to the most recent Point in Time count, there are over 8,000 people living without housing in San Francisco, a number that has likely increased significantly since 2019 (Applied Survey Research, 2019). Even using this likely underestimation, by the city's own count there is less than 1 water source for every 145 unhoused residents, well under the UNHCR WASH standard of 1 source per 100 people. Compounding this severe deficiency are the fact that

many of the current available water sources are located in areas of high traffic for tourists (for example, Golden Gate Park is home to eight alone), rather than where there are high concentrations of people living on the street or in congregate shelters. Additionally, water sources are often located in parks, which are not always accessible to unhoused people 24 hours a day. When considered together, these factors paint the picture of thousands of people forced to live for a prolonged period of time with very limited access to the UN recognized human right of water, far below even the minimum standard set by the UN for refugees under emergency circumstances.



"[I have] no access to water. I have to make a commute to go get water. I go to Golden Gate Street. I have to figure out how to carry it around. How do you carry it around with disabilities? Water fountains in the Tenderloin are temporary. We need global tap type design in water fountains."

Charles
Unhoused survey respondent in the Mission district

Human Cost of Water Access

For unhoused San Franciscans, the human rights violation of being denied access to water and sanitation services intersects with myriad other systemic abuses faced daily, such as criminalization, racism, and ableism. As UN Special Rapporteur Leilani Farha implied in her 2018 visit to the Bay Area, these intersections are at least partially intentional, with the denial of water being an integral part of the city's response to street homelessness (Brinklow, 2018).

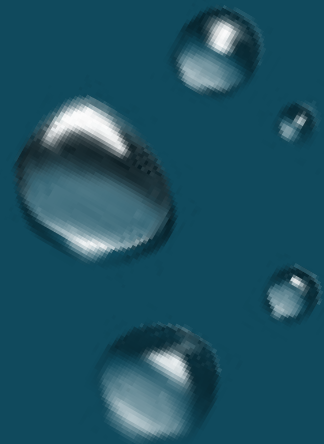
This report is a collection and presentation of the testimonies of unhoused San Franciscans and their experiences with accessing water, with the intent of highlighting how severe the lack of water is for people living on the streets in San Francisco. In doing so, it also shows by whom the impact of this human rights abuse is felt most strongly, illustrating the intersections of water access with disability justice and racial equity. Perhaps most importantly, these testimonies provide a roadmap for how the city can immediately begin to address the issue; including what types of resources are needed and where they are needed most. These solutions should be seen as a short-term response to an urgent public health crisis and abuse of human rights faced by thousands of San Francisco's most vulnerable residents. The long-term solution to this and the many other crises caused by homelessness, in the words of Catarina de Albuquerque, "must be to ensure adequate housing."

Attempting to discourage residents from remaining in informal settlements or encampments by denying access to water, sanitation, health services, and other basic necessities, as has been witnessed by the Special Rapporteur in San Francisco and Oakland, constitutes cruel and inhuman treatment and is a violation of multiple human rights, including the rights to life, housing, health, and water and sanitation.

Leilani Farha
United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing



Street Survey





Survey Design

The Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco's Human Rights Workgroup collaborated in creating a WASH assessment designed to catalogue the lived experience of unhoused San Franciscans and identify their solutions to the current crisis. The survey focused on water accessibility (barriers and current access), water usage, and water storage providing the opportunity for respondents to articulate their daily attempts to access water in San Francisco. The WASH Assessment was based on international minimum water standards established by Sphere, UNHCR, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization (Appendix 1).

Survey Questions

1. Do you have any barriers to accessing your water needs? If 'Yes', what are those barriers?
2. Do you have access to 15 liters of safe water per day? If Yes, do you have access to 50 liters of safe water per day?
3. Do you have access to water within a 30 min round trip travel and wait time? If Yes, do you travel more than 250 meters to get access to water? (approx. 2 city blocks or a 2-4min walk)
4. What do you use water for on a typical day? Check all that apply: Drinking, Washing, Showering, Water for pets, Water for plants, Other
5. How much water in gallons or liters do you use on a typical day?
6. Where do you currently access water? List all sources that you utilize. (Be as specific as possible, water fountain, manifold, theft. Include locations, street names, corner stores, etc.) If you purchase water, on average how much money do you spend in a day on water?
7. Do you store water when you access it? If Yes, what kind of water storage container do you use?
8. How much water in gallons or liters would you ideally use in a typical day if you had improved water access?
9. Where would you like to see new water access points in the Tenderloin? (Give specific street names, landmarks, etc.)
10. What features would you like to see in a new water access point? (i.e. water fountains, water bottle filling stations, pet fountain, etc.)
11. What kind of reusable water storage container would you prefer to have?



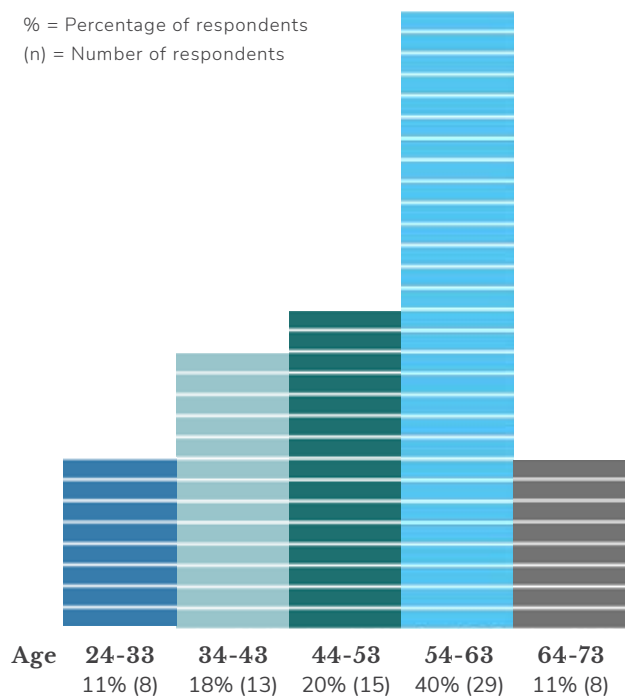
Methodology

To conduct the survey, unhoused and precariously housed San Franciscans were reached through direct street outreach in our geographic focus area of the Tenderloin and other locations. A total of 73 surveys were conducted during the winter months of 2020/21. The survey responses were collected on a Google survey form.

Age of Survey Respondents

The age range of the 73 people surveyed was age 24 to 70.

% = Percentage of respondents
(n) = Number of respondents



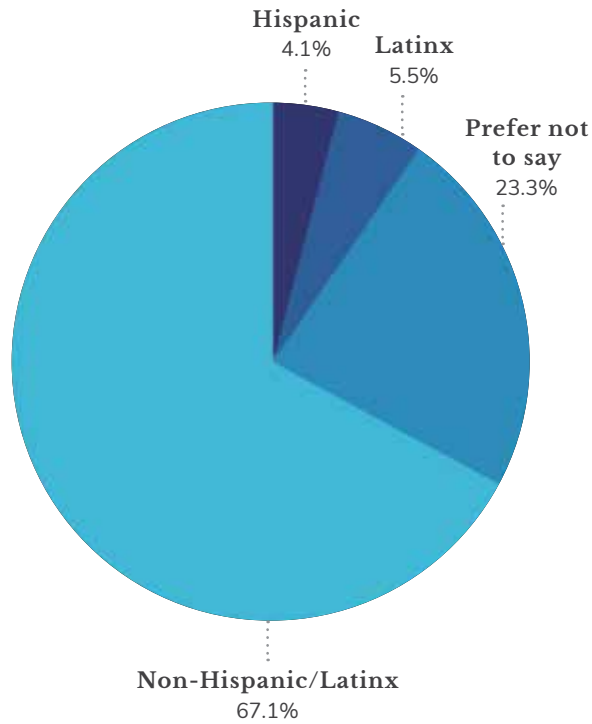
Gender of Survey Respondents

The current gender demographics of the 73 people surveyed.



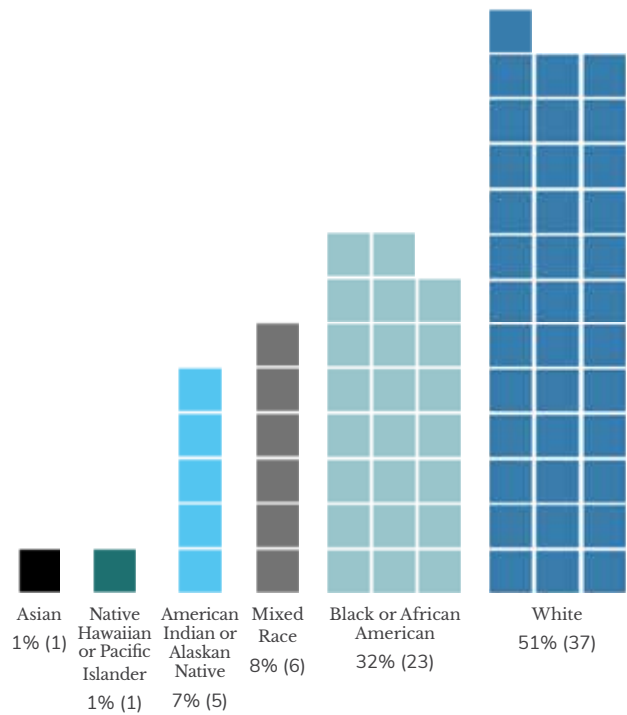
Ethnicity of Survey Respondents

The ethnic breakdown of the 73 people surveyed.



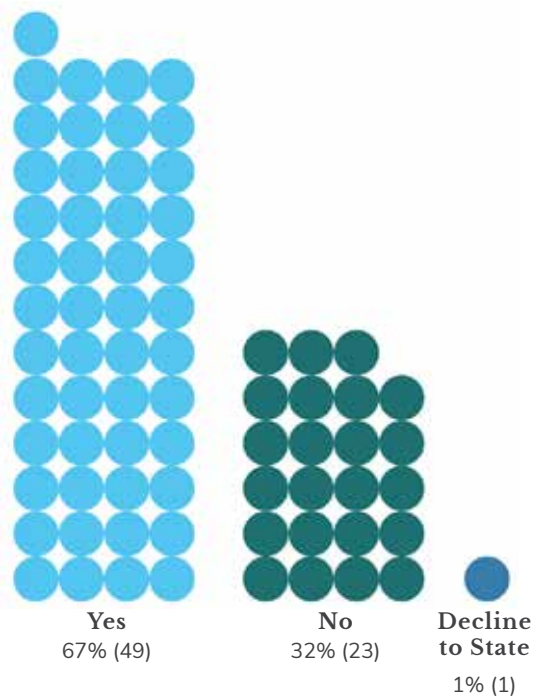
Race of Survey Respondents

The racial demographics of the 73 people surveyed.



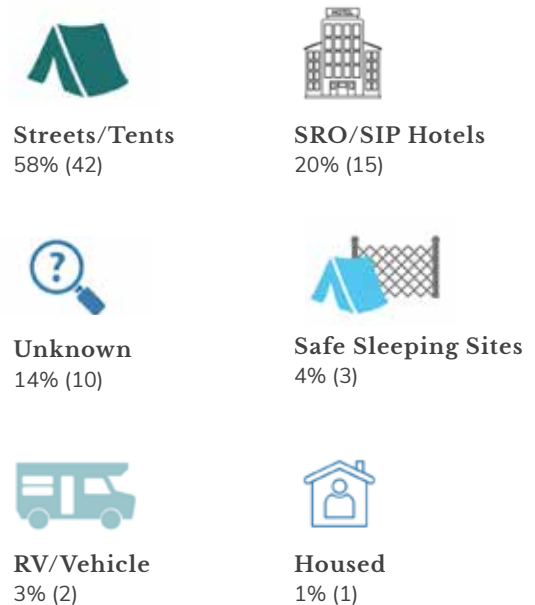
Survey Respondents with Disabilities

The breakdown of respondents who identified with a disability/ies.



Survey Respondents' Living Situation

The current living situation of 63 out of the 73 people surveyed. 10 respondents did not share information.





Analysis: Water Accessibility


Barriers to Water Access

Do you have any barriers to accessing your water needs? If Yes, what are those barriers?
73 total responses; 50 affirmative responses

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents reported confronting barriers to accessing their basic water needs. Of the 68% of respondents who shared that everyday they face barriers and struggle to meet their basic water needs, the underlying issue ultimately is homelessness. San Francisco fails to guarantee housing for the over 8,000 unhoused and many of the over 30,000 living in Single Room Occupancies (SROs) lack robust and consistent water access, sanitation, and hygiene.

For individuals living on the street, respondents' top responses included "limited outlets & travel/distance to outlets" (49), "no money" (6), and "the policing of water" (8) as the major barriers to water access for street-based homeless.

With the dearth of water outlets and current infrastructural emphasis on water bottle refilling stations instead of universal water fountains (fountains that feature three water spouts, a pet bowl, and an open spout for jugs and other uses), survey respondents highlighted that San Francisco fails to provide adequate water outlets for unhoused San Franciscans and the broader community. Many of the current public water outlets are reserved to parks (with limited hours availability) and/or locations in the western part of the city. Some survey respondents shared that while they reside on Tenderloin streets, they have attempted to travel to one of the eight public water outlets in Golden Gate Park to access water. Such a journey could be 2-5 miles long and take over an hour by foot.



“No water on 6th St. Being homeless and looking dirty prevents me from accessing water at a store or restaurant.”

Survey Respondent

As part of the water access process for unhoused San Franciscans, ten (10) respondents reported that they either tried to access public water outlets and pay for water, or acknowledged the barriers to public water outlets and solely focused on attempting to purchase water. Regardless of their approach, six (6) respondents noted that the major barrier to accessing water for them was “no money.” As the United States and other societies continue to commodify water, its access will continue to be limited to those with the financial means to do so. For unhoused San Franciscans and those without consistent access to money, purchasing water will continue to be a barrier to water consumption.

In conjunction with its commodification, water is also policed through institutional and social means. “Policing of water” was the third major barrier to accessing water based on our survey respondents, but the various mechanisms reported by respondents highlights the many interlocking systems that deny access to water for unhoused San Franciscans.


The “policing of water” comes in two main forms.

1. Respondents reported being denied access to water, or harassed by San Francisco police, private security companies, the guards of private properties such as hotels, and employees of public institutions such as libraries. Respondents shared that both public and private water outlets were surveilled. They were denied

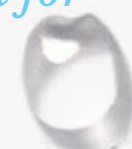
Beyond the limited outlets which leads to travel/ distance barriers, respondents reported that two major issues arose from this. Elderly respondents and those with disabilities highlighted how difficult accessing public water outlets could be, let alone the 2-5 miles long journey to Golden Gate Park embarked by other respondents. Furthermore, respondents shared that they risked having their personal and survival items taken or trashed, while leaving their residence to obtain water.

“It’s hard to walk. I can’t stand for long.”


“Distance to water points [is a barrier] ... some water points close at night.”



“Distance [is a barrier], carrying it back, not knowing where the hoses are. You can search for hours.”



“No where to get water for free. Not many places offer that service.”



Survey Respondents

access to these outlets and were forced to seek water at a different location.

2. Respondents mentioned that owners and workers of restaurants, corner stores, and gas stations denied them access to water. Unhoused San Franciscans were denied access to water generally for either appearing dirty or disheveled or were forced to purchase something to access water, thereby returning to the second major barrier for respondents in accessing water.

“When I’m homeless it’s hard to find water and when we find a spigot, it tastes rusty. There used to be more water, now it’s harder.”



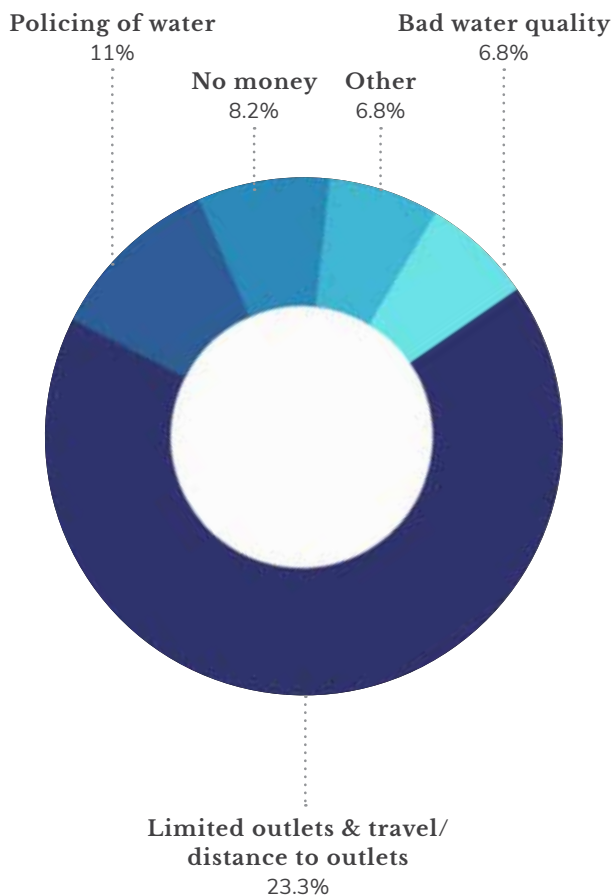
“Corner stores judge you on your appearance and it could mean the difference between if you get water or not.”

“I get my water from lettuce. It’s got pure water. I ain’t drink a drink of water in 6 months to be honest. People say you can’t go without water I got news for em I just get a head of lettuce and eat it all in one day and that’s the water I need.”

Survey Respondents

Barriers to Water Access

50 out of the 73 people surveyed named the barriers that prevent them from meeting their basic water needs daily.



Amount of Water Accessed

Do you have access to 15 liters of safe water per day?

73 total responses; 44 negative responses and 29 affirmative responses

If Yes, do you have access to 50 liters of safe water per day?

29 total responses; 10 negative responses and 19 affirmative responses



On Question 2, survey respondents were asked to reflect on the amount of water they utilized after navigating the numerous barriers to water access. The international Sphere handbook, as noted earlier in the report, states the lowest acceptable standard for emergency situations is 15 liters, which was utilized in the formation of this question to highlight the severity of the crisis for unhoused San Franciscans in the Tenderloin. Our survey found that 60%, or 44 out of 73 respondents, did not have access to at least 15L of water, falling below the lowest acceptable standard for emergency situations. 74% of respondents did not have access to 50L/day, nearly two-thirds of respondents fall below the international minimum standards for the universal standard, and nearly three-quarters the middle-income, urban standard.

For individuals that did have access to at least 15 liters, we followed up by asking if they had access to 50 liters of potable water (urban minimum standards based off of the Sphere handbook). Of the 40% of individuals who had at least 15L of water, 34% had less than 50L and 66% had access to at least 50L. Regardless of the responses, unhoused San Franciscans after overcoming the barriers, including “limited outlets & travel/distance to outlets,” “no money,” and “policing of water,” still only utilized anywhere from 10-30% of the water utilized by housed San Franciscans (155L per day), with 75% utilizing less than 30% of the water used by an average housed San Franciscan.

Daily Access to Water

The majority of survey respondents do not have adequate daily access to water.



Only 40% of respondents have access to at least 15L of water daily.



Only 26% of respondents have access to at least 50L of water daily.

Time and Distance to Access Water

Do you have access to water within a 30 min round trip travel and wait time? If Yes, do you travel more than 250 meters to get access to water?

73 total responses; 46 affirmative responses and 27 negative responses

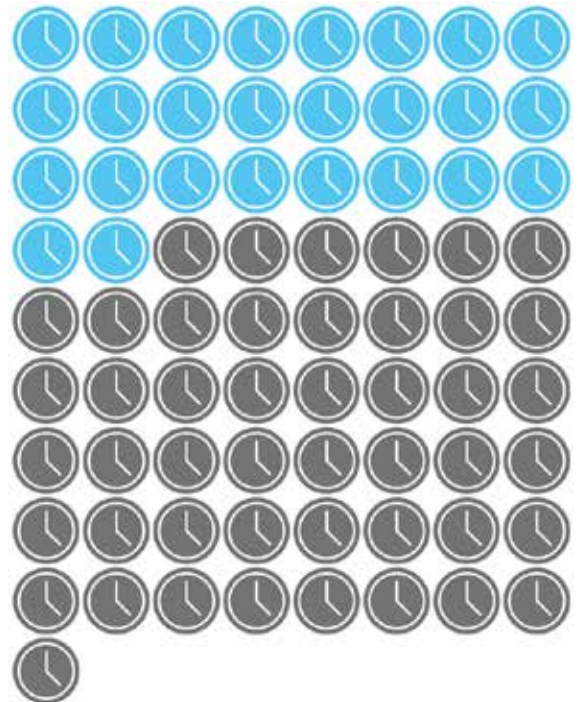
The responses to questions 1 and 2 of the survey highlighted that unhoused San Franciscans confront numerous barriers to accessing water that dramatically impacts their ability to access and use. For question 3, survey respondents were asked to share the travel and wait time for their nearest water outlet utilizing 30 minutes round trip travel and wait time (WHO and UNICEF standard that places these individuals below “basic access” into “limited access) to contextualize the experiences of people on the streets.

For this part of the question, 26 out of 73 respondents do not have access to water within a 30 minute round trip and wait time. 36% of respondents could not access water highlighting that not only do many on the streets have to confront and circumvent barriers impacting their water consumption and usage, but that these respondents represent a population whose access to water falls below the absolute lowest international standard. Therefore 63%, or 47 out of 73 respondents, shared that they do have access to water within a 30 minute round trip and wait time. However while these respondents do report access, these individuals still confronted the barriers highlighted under question 1 and 60% of respondents failed to access and utilize 15L (absolute lowest international standard). So while a majority of respondents have “basic access” to water within a 30 minute round trip and wait time, it must be framed within the barriers and that water usage remains critically low.

In a follow-up to whether respondents had water access within 30 minutes, we queried the 47 affirmative respondents if they travelled more than 250 meters (approximately two city blocks or a 2-4 minute walk) to access water. This question is based on UNHCR’s

Time and Distance to Water

Survey respondents were asked to share the travel and wait time for their nearest water outlet utilizing 30 minutes round trip travel and wait time.



36% of respondents cannot access water within a 30-minute round trip, including wait time.



78% do not meet the combined minimum international standards for time and distance to a safe water source.

*“I’m trying
[to get water]
wherever I am.”*

Survey Respondent

standard for maximum distance to a safe water source in emergency contexts (500 meters) and post-emergency contexts (200 meters). These individuals shared that only 36% or 17 could access water within a 30 minute round trip and within 250 meters. On the other hand, the other 29 respondents did not, meaning that 78% (57 out of 73) of respondents do not meet the combined minimum international standards for time and distance to a safe water source.

This survey question highlights just how far survey respondents have to travel (which was the most mentioned barrier to water) and that even those people who do have access within 250 meters confront the other barriers (including “No Money,” “Policing of water,” and other ones mentioned) in their attempts to access water. These dynamics coalesce to limit the access and use of water for the majority of survey respondents.

Water Sources

Where do you currently access water? List all sources that you utilize.

73 total responses

If you purchase water, on average how much money do you spend in a day on water?

48 responses

For question 6 of the survey, we asked respondents to share the location of their water access via type and/or location to better understand the locations that unhoused San Franciscans frequented for their water access. We asked respondents to be as specific about the source as possible, such as water fountain, manifold, theft, including locations and street names wherever possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has completely altered the day-to-day lives of unhoused San Franciscans impacting their ability to form communities, utilize services, and access basic necessities such as water. Many of the

locations where unhoused San Franciscans accessed water were at corner stores, hotels, restaurants/coffee shops, and other similar spots, which have been closed for multiple months or due to precautionary measures and anxieties around COVID have altered their approach or have ceased to provide water for people living on the street.

However, the pandemic has also compelled political leaders and department officials to act on longstanding issues with policy solutions previously thought of as ludicrous. One such policy that dramatically improved water access for unhoused San Franciscans was

utilizing fire hydrants as water access points throughout the Tenderloin and across other locations in the city. Thirty-eight percent of, or 28 out of 73, survey respondents reported using the temporary “water manifolds” that were attached to these fire hydrants as their main source of accessing water.

Other common places to access water were from non-profit organizations (34%), including GLIDE and St. Anthony’s, at congregate shelter sites, and through outreach workers and other homeless service providers, such as Urban Alchemy.

As the COVID pandemic exacerbated the lacking water access infrastructure, people living on the street

“[I get water from the] hotel next to my tent, where I ask for water. Sometimes they say yes, sometimes they say no.”

“[I get water] at hotels’ fill-up ice buckets.”

“I would buy it at cheap supermarkets with my food stamps.”



Sources of Water Access



38% access water at temporary water manifolds



34% access water through nonprofits and other homeless service providers



23% access water at a corner store (purchased, donated, or taken)



14% access water via SROs or tourist hotels



11% access water from friends (housed & unhoused)



11% access water from public fountains



11% access water from public restrooms or pit stops



10% access water from restaurants or coffee shops

Survey Respondents

began to utilize the temporary water manifolds and homeless service providers as the main access points for water as previously frequented places grappled with the pandemic, CDC guidelines, and shifting political priorities. These frequented places, corner stores and tourist hotels, continued to provide water for people living on the streets, but their availability altered throughout the pandemic and the “policing of water” previously invoked anti-poor and anti-homeless discourse, now intertwined hygiene discourse with anxieties around COVID. Nevertheless, corner stores continued to be locations where people could purchase or be provided water and tourist hotels’ ice buckets and giving security continued to be locations of water access for unhoused San Franciscans.

Public water fountains, sometimes barred behind closed park fences, and restaurants and coffee shops also continued to be locations for people to access water, though they also were uncertain and potential locations for targeting and harassment.

Less common responses, included respondents sharing that they accessed water through friends, either unhoused community members with access to water who shared or housed community members who would open their private homes and garages to share their water resources, YWAM's public showers, and some of the City's parks, beaches, and campsites.

Other responses included gas stations, public restrooms, residents or tourists sharing their water, Pit Stops, accessing water whenever and wherever, a location in a Mission, discarded bottles, lettuce, from the supermarket, public library, and the ferry building.

A follow-up question asked respondents if they purchased water, and how much they spent per day.

“Water manifolds look gross doesn’t (sic) use them . . . Corner stores mostly . . . No accessible water fountains in [the Tenderloin].”

“I get water at the corner store and at GLIDE, when they give out water bottles.”

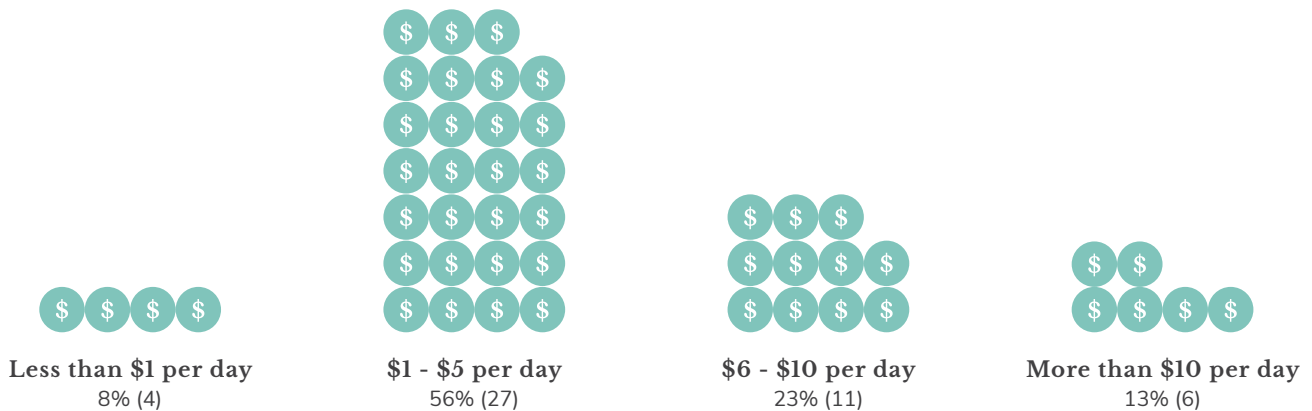
“I used to go to a park, but the fountain is closed.”



Survey Respondents

Daily Spend on Water

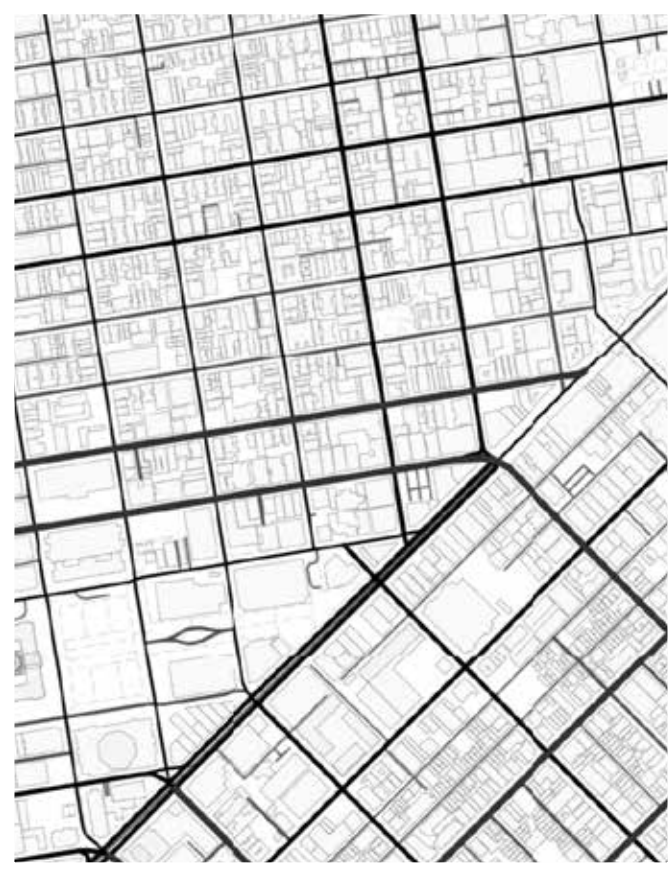
48 people (67% of respondents) purchase water. Here's how much they spend per day.



Desired Location of Water Access Points

Where would you like to see new water access points in the Tenderloin?

71 total responses



For question 9, we asked survey respondents to share where they would like water access points to be located across the Tenderloin. We found that respondents had numerous places, where they believed a water access point would be beneficial for the community.

29 different respondents emphasized that water outlets should be spread across the Tenderloin with one placed between every 1 to 4 blocks.

“At least on every other block.”

“At service providers where you could also have a place to do laundry and take shower.”

“Every block, equally spread throughout the Tenderloin.”

“I want an access point on every 3rd or 4th block. That would be great. So that you wouldn’t have to walk more than a couple of blocks.”

“Spread them out and more bathrooms.”

“Everywhere! On as many blocks as possible. Water should be free!”

Survey Respondents



Analysis: Water Usage

Daily Water Use

What do you use water for on a typical day?

73 total responses

Beyond water access, we wanted to explore the daily use of water by unhoused San Franciscans. We asked four questions to allow respondents to share their current usage and what a meaningful expansion of water access would mean for their daily use. Question 4 began by asking respondents what their water use on a typical day consisted of.

The majority of respondents reported utilizing water (for drinking) as their primary use with 70 out of 73 (76%). The next three usages received more than five responses including “washing dishes and clothes” (46), “showering” (35), “water for pets” (13). Without consistent laundry services, many respondents shared that they would hand-wash their clothes and maintained upkeep on their dishes to ensure hygiene and sanitation. Nearly half (48%) of respondents

reported using water to bathe one’s face and armpits (sometimes including the groin and anus), sometimes referred to as “bird baths,” in the qualitative portion of the survey. Concluding the more frequent responses was water for pets to drink. Pets, frequently dogs, remain an integral part of street life for many unhoused San Franciscans providing crucial camaraderie and protection. 18% reported securing and sharing water with their pets on a given day.

Other options shared by fewer than 7% of respondents included “cooking” (5), “teeth brushing” (5), “handwashing” (4), “water for plants” (4), “food replacement (including coffee)” (4), “cleaning of tent/ encampment area” (3), “substance use” (3), “bathroom” (2), and “warmth” (1).

Actual Amount of Water Usage

How much water in gallons or liters do you use on a typical day?

73 total responses

On question 5, respondents were asked to quantify the amount of water they used on a typical day. For ease of reading, we have converted all responses (which came in liters, gallons, and ounces) into liters.

When respondents were asked to quantify their water use, their actual water use was even lower than what was suggested by a simple a 'Yes' or 'No' answer to question 2. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents reported using less than 4L of water daily, with 21% of them being unsure or unable to know how much water they attempted to subsist on in a given day. The other 36% of respondents were split evenly into two groups: 13 respondents who used 4-8L in a day and another 13 who used +9L in a day. For context, the average housed San Franciscan uses over 155L in a day.



“A whole iceberg lettuce a day.”

“Just to wash my butt. I don’t weigh it or count it.”

“None. I really just drink coffee mostly.”

“I use very little. A couple of cups. A little bit for shaving every other day.”

“I use 2 bottles of water, so around a liter of water. That is if I am lucky.”

Survey Respondents

Ideal Amount of Water Usage

How much water in gallons or liters would you ideally use in a typical day if you had improved water access?

64 responses

When asked how much water they would ideally use in a typical day if their current barriers to accessing water were removed, 67% of respondents stated they would utilize 15 liters of water or more per day, the lowest threshold set by the international community for water access. This number decreased to 39% of respondents stating they would use 50 liters of water or more per day, the international urban minimum

standard for water access. Thirty percent (30%) of respondents stated they would ideally use 100 liters of water or more per day, while only 17% of respondents stated they would consume the San Francisco average of 155 liters of water or more per day. Three percent of respondents said they would continue to use their current amount and 2% stated that they did not know how much water they would ideally use if their water



access was improved. Perhaps the most shocking responses were among the 28% of unhoused residents surveyed who stated that they would ideally use less than 15 liters of water per day.

At surface level, this data confirms that an overwhelming majority of unhoused San Franciscans would like to receive at least the international minimum standards for water access. However, perhaps the more interesting picture revealed by this data is how the impact of surviving on the streets of San Francisco has produced a limited imagination of what is possible. For instance, a 10 minute shower on average uses 95 liters

“[I would use] 1 gallon for drinking and many more gallons for other needs.”



“40-50 Gallons so I could shower everyday.”

*“Much more than 5 gallons.”
“I would use around 30 gallons a day if I could.”*

“As much as (I) need, unlimited.”

“I would be drinking water if I knew the water source.”

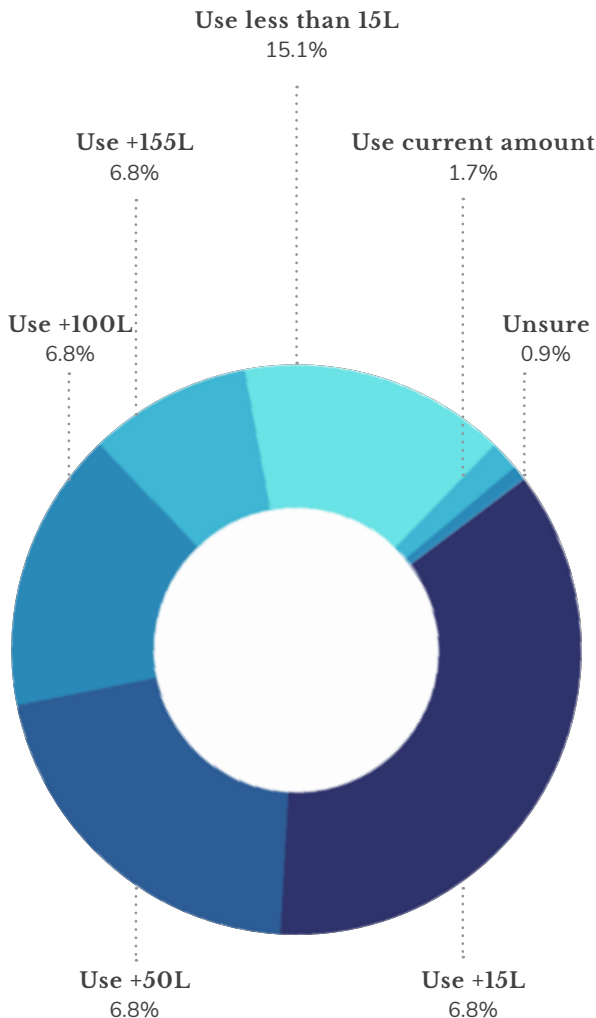
Survey Respondents

of water, which would imply that only 30% of unhoused respondents surveyed would ideally want a shower on a typical day. While this scenario is possible, it is more likely that the people who have been deprived of essential services like adequate access to water cannot easily imagine a scenario beyond their current pattern of surviving on the streets. In cases where respondents asked if they would have access to a kitchen and bathroom for their ideal water use, the ideal amount of water per day increased substantially, highlighting the strong connection between water access and housing.



Ideal Amount of Water Usage

98% of respondents would like to use more water than what they're currently able to access.



Ideal Water Access Point

What features would you like to see in a new water access point?

73 total responses

We also asked our survey respondents what features they would like to see at the new water access points. As Question 4 of the survey highlighted, unhoused San Franciscans utilize water for various purposes including drinking, cooking, for pets, and to maintain some form of hygiene and sanitation. With this in mind, we engaged respondents on what these water access points could offer them as they attempt to survive on the streets. Based on the survey, a version of the multi-purpose, barrier-free pedestal water fountain featuring different spouts would serve people living on the streets and ultimately all of those living and visiting San Francisco. 55% of respondents proposed fixtures feature water bottle filling stations, while another 37% of respondents envisioned water fountains.

Ideal Features Requested for New Water Access Points



26% would like an expansion of showers and bathrooms



22% would like fountains (or spouts) for pets



15% would like spouts for buckets and jugs



8% would like water manifolds



8% are unsure or do not have specific requests



Other answers included hot/cold water, and water for laundry and hand-washing





Analysis: Water Storage

Water Vessels

Do you store water when you access it?

73 total responses

If Yes, what kind of water storage container do you use?

56 responses

Nearly eight out of ten (78%) respondents stated that they routinely store water when they access it. Nearly all respondents (96%) who reported storing water used plastic bottles ranging from 16 ounces to 1 gallon as their water storage container. Of the remaining 4%, half (2%) store water in metal water bottles and 2% reported storing water in empty glass bottles.

The very high proportion of respondents that rely on storing water to meet their essential water needs further highlights barriers faced by many unhoused San Franciscans to accessing safe water sources (i.e. distance, time). When reliable and convenient water access is not available, storing water for future use is a common mitigation measure to water scarcity. This need to store water, due to long trips to access safe water sources, adds an additional physical burden for unhoused community members, as 1 gallon of water weighs over 8 pounds. This burden is especially taxing for those with mobility issues.

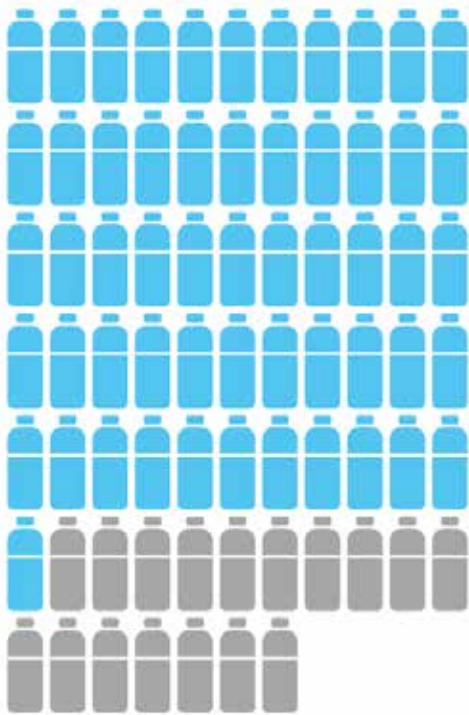
“Wine bottles, liquor bottles, anything that I can get my hands on, juice bottles. I prefer plastic over glass containers.”

“Big clear water bottles. Fill usually about 5 if I have to carry. I can do 10 if I have my shopping (cart). I give water (to) friends and when I have my shop(ping cart)...to people (who) are disabled.”

Survey Respondents

Water Storage

98% of respondents would like to use more water than what they're currently able to access.



78% of respondents routinely store water when they can.



96% reported storing water used plastic bottles of various shapes and sizes ranging from 16 ounces to 1 gallon. 1 respondent uses metal water bottle and another uses empty glass bottles.

“Water bottle. I buy it and carry in backpack.”

“In empty plastic bottles.”

“I use a thermos bottle to store hot water. But only sometimes.”

“I put it in reusable jugs and put it in a shopping cart.”

“We store water in a big jug to save it for our dogs.”

Survey Respondents





Ideal Water Storage

What kind of reusable water storage container would you prefer to have?

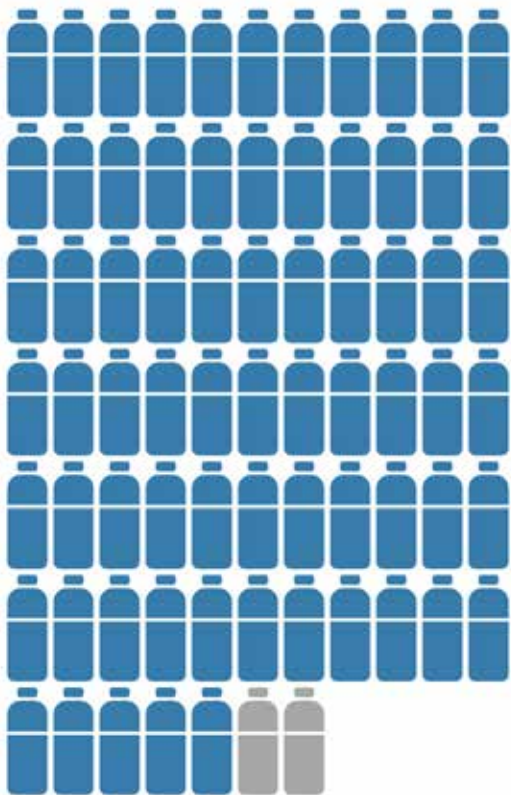
72 total responses

Due to the overwhelming need among the unhoused community to store their water for future use, 97% of respondents stated that a reusable water storage container would be helpful considering their current water access constraints.

Among these respondents, 22% would prefer a 1-gallon water bottle, 18% preferred a jug with spigot, another 18% preferred a hydration bladder, while 17% of respondents would prefer a 5-gallon jug. Twenty-two percent (22%) of respondents stated that they would prefer a water bottle, with 13% preferring a

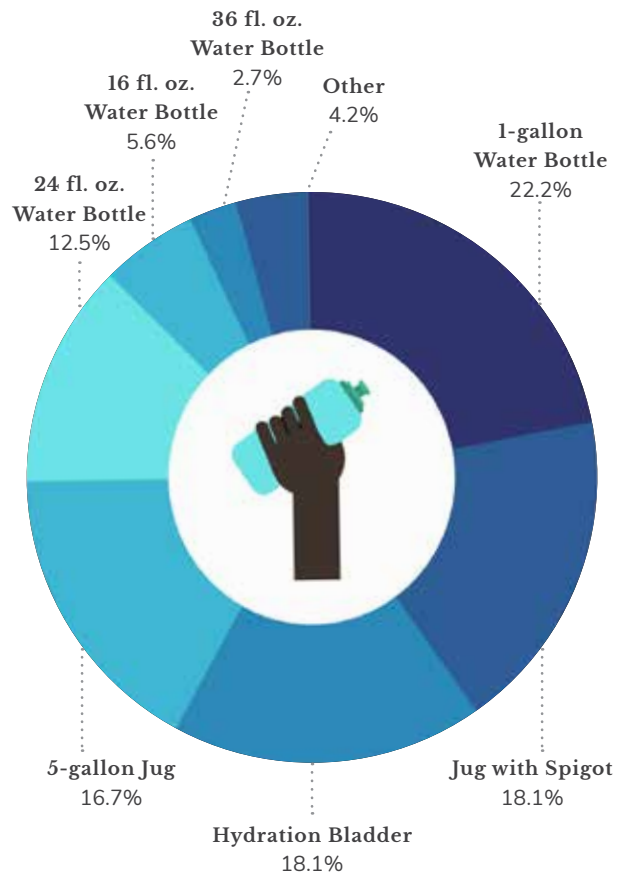
medium (24 fl. oz.) water bottle, 6% preferring a small (16 fl. oz.) water bottle (small), and 3% preferring a large (36 fl. oz.) water bottle. The remaining 4% of respondents would prefer another option. While this data reveals the necessary need for water storage among San Francisco's unhoused population, it also highlights that a person's preference for managing their water storage varies. This variability is determined by various factors, likely including a person's physical health (i.e. ability to carry water versus store water in a cart) as well as their surrounding environment (e.g. security of their belongings, frequency of displacement).

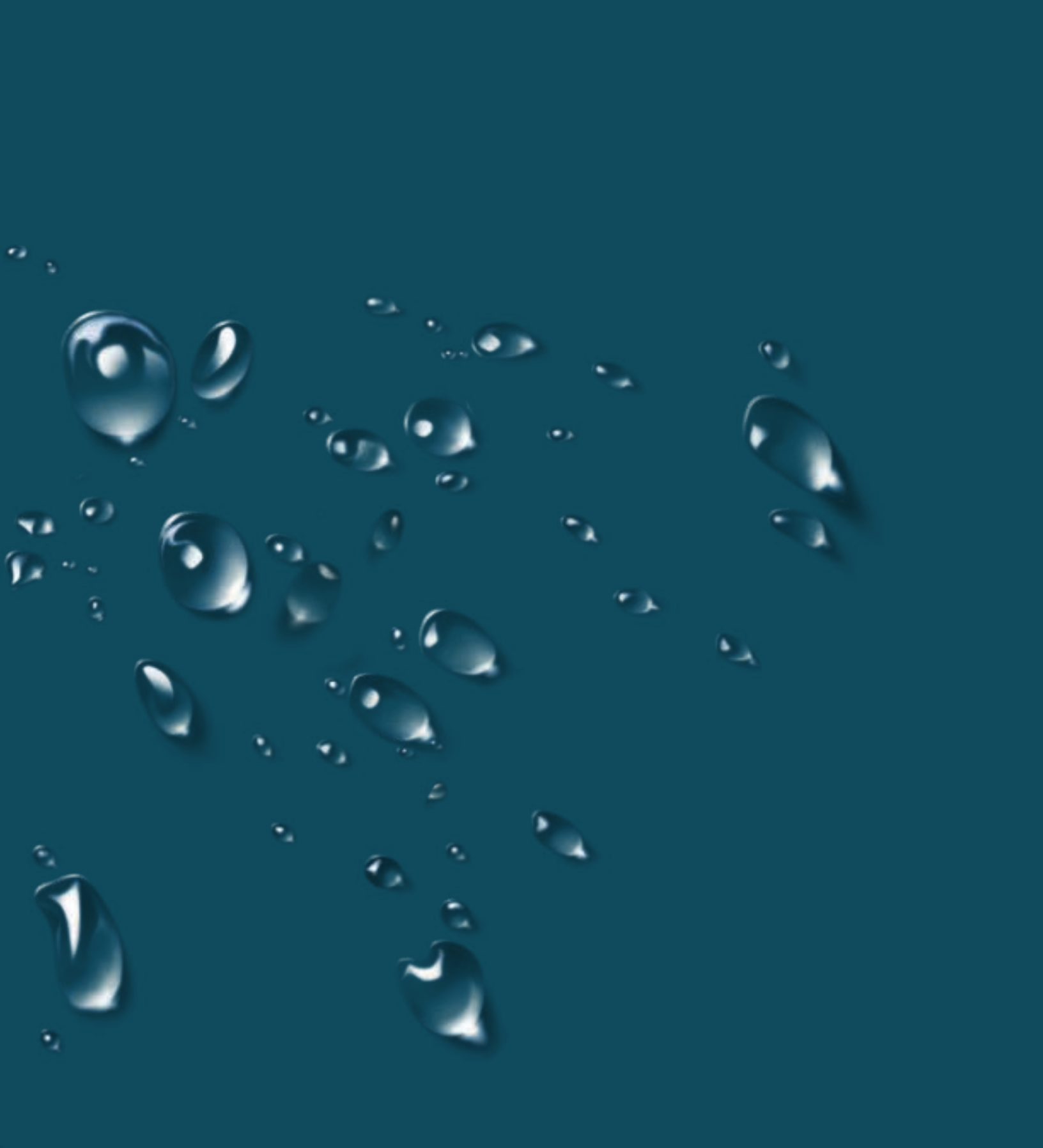
Need for Water Storage



97% of respondents would use a reusable water storage container.

Ideal Water Storage Vessels





Recommendations

Increase Public Water Points

As this report highlights, there is a significant need to increase water access in San Francisco, especially among unhoused San Franciscans, who have historically been marginalized. In the immediate short term, the city should install three (3) permanent public water stations in the Tenderloin. Since the Tenderloin disproportionately hosts the majority of unhoused San Franciscans, this measure can provide immediate relief to this troubling situation. This can happen within the next three months of the existing budget cycle, with the resources that have already been allocated toward city departmental budgets.

In the medium term, San Francisco would need to significantly increase water stations throughout the city, prioritizing locations that effectively serve unhoused San Franciscans. To facilitate this, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) would need to include unhoused San Franciscans into their Water Supply Master Plan for San Francisco, in line with SFPUC's commitment toward equity. San Francisco should settle for nothing less than a Water Supply Master Plan that plans for all San Franciscans.

In the long term, San Francisco would need to increase water stations across the city to provide adequate public water access for all, including recently unhoused residents, housed residents, and visitors to San Francisco. Although this report focuses primarily on the plight of unhoused San Franciscans, it doesn't take long living in or visiting San Francisco to notice how difficult it is to refill a water bottle or access a drink of water while in public spaces without resorting to purchasing an item from a restaurant or cafe. Consequently, expanding public water stations in San Francisco would benefit all. It is recommended that the

majority of funding for these public water points come from the city. However, it is also recommended that San Francisco-based companies fund a portion of these public water points, especially public water points near their businesses, as a way to promote the human right to water for all.

Although this report has largely focused on water access in public spaces, it should be clearly stated here that much of a person's water needs should ideally be met within a home. Therefore, a prioritization of permanent housing for unhoused San Franciscans will address the water access crisis highlighted in this report, along with a myriad of other issues that stable housing resolves. In the words of Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, "Homelessness is a profound assault on dignity, social inclusion and the right to life. It is a prima facie violation of the right to housing and violates a number of other human rights in addition to the right to life, including non-discrimination, health, water and sanitation, security of the person and freedom from cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment" (Human Rights Council, 2019). Consequently, no long-term solutions addressing increased water access in San Francisco should be done without also prioritizing permanent affordable housing.



Increase Public Sanitation & Hygiene Facilities

From the lens of public health, personal dignity, and human rights, adequate water access is inherently linked to available access to sanitation and hygiene facilities. When adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities are missing from public spaces, the negative impacts on vulnerable community members often reach further than inconvenience or impaired health. Catarina de Albuquerque, UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, boldly addressed this in her 2011 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation on her mission to the United States of America from 22 February to 4 March 2011.

De Albuquerque states, “As a part of her mission, the independent expert examined the situation of the homeless with regard to access to water and sanitation. Up to 3.5 million people experience homelessness in the United States every year, and on any given night over 800,000 people are homeless. In some cities, homelessness is being increasingly criminalized. Criminalization includes fines, arrests and severance of social protection benefits or even access to employment. Local statutes prohibiting public urination and defecation—which can constitute a sexual offence in some cases—while facially constitutional to protect public health, are often discriminatory in their effects. Such discrimination often occurs because such statutes are enforced against homeless individuals who often have no access to public restrooms and are given no alternatives. Furthermore, there is an increasing trend in local governments to limit opening hours or close entirely public restrooms. Such decisions are contrary to the need to create an enabling environment so homeless individuals can realize their rights to water and sanitation.” (de Albuquerque, 2011)

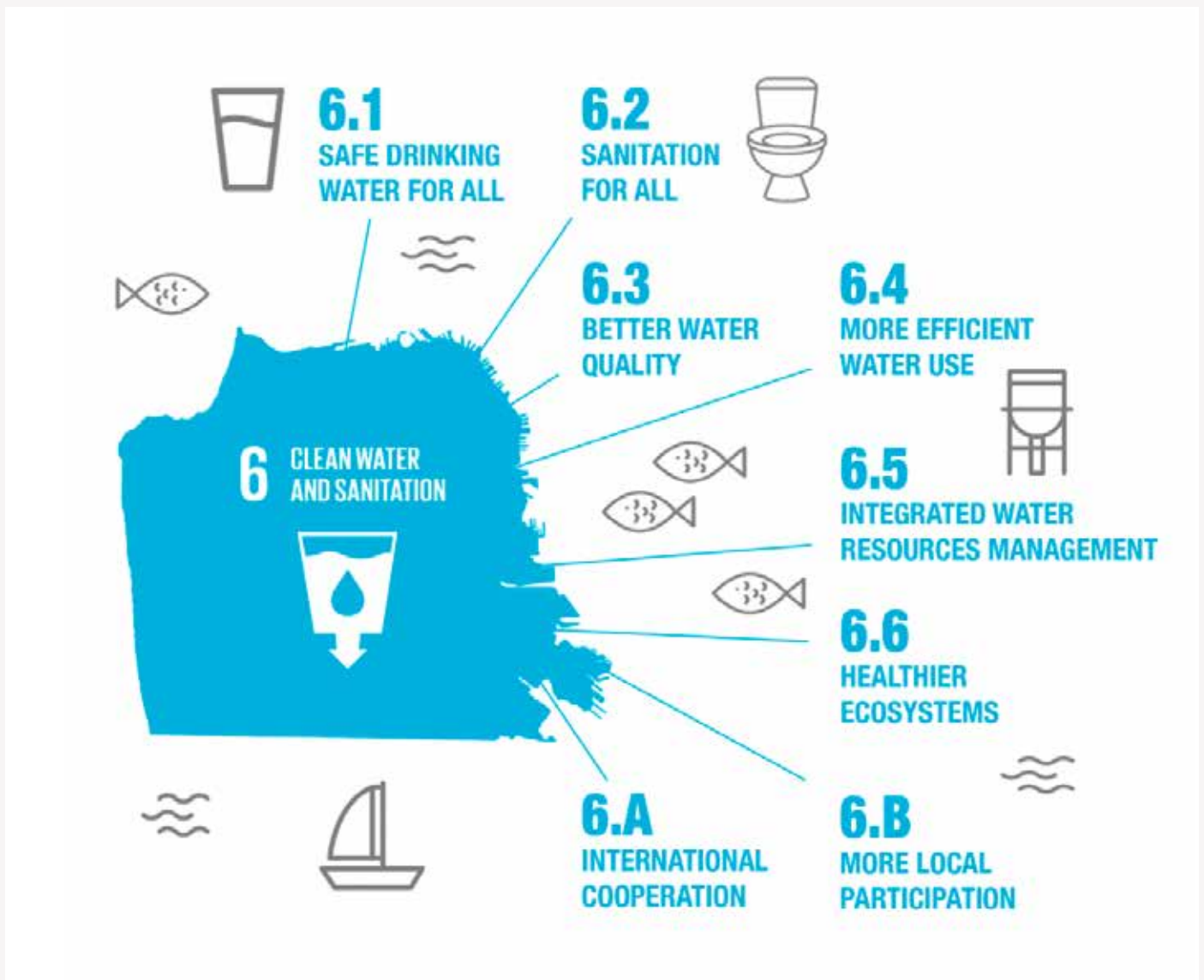
In light of this reality, there is the need to increase sanitation and hygiene facilities across the city to provide adequate public sanitation and hygiene access for all, including recently unhoused residents, housed residents, and visitors to San Francisco. Practically, this could include significantly increasing the number of permanent “Pit Stop” toilets in key locations throughout the city, based on the needs of unhoused San Franciscans, as well as significantly increasing the number of permanent street-accessible public bathrooms and showers in key locations. This fundamental investment into basic WASH facilities across the city will benefit all residents and visitors to San Francisco.

San Francisco Acknowledge Water and Sanitation as a Human Right



Considering that the United Nations, the United States, and the State of California have all acknowledged the human right to water and sanitation, it would be consistent for San Francisco to also formally recognize that access to water and sanitation is a human right. Furthermore, San Francisco should hold itself

accountable to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) broadly, as Los Angeles has. (Los Angeles Sustainable Development Goals, 2019). Specifically, San Francisco should commit to SDG Goal #6 that calls for “available and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. (*The 17 Goals*, n.d.)



Appendix



Appendix 1: International Minimum Standards for Water Access

International Minimum Standards for Water Volume:

- 15 liters per person per day (emergency context) - Sphere, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO
- 20 liters per person per day (post-emergency context) - UNHCR
- 50 liters per person per day (minimum standard for urban middle-income context) - Sphere

International Minimum Standards for Travel Time to Water Source:

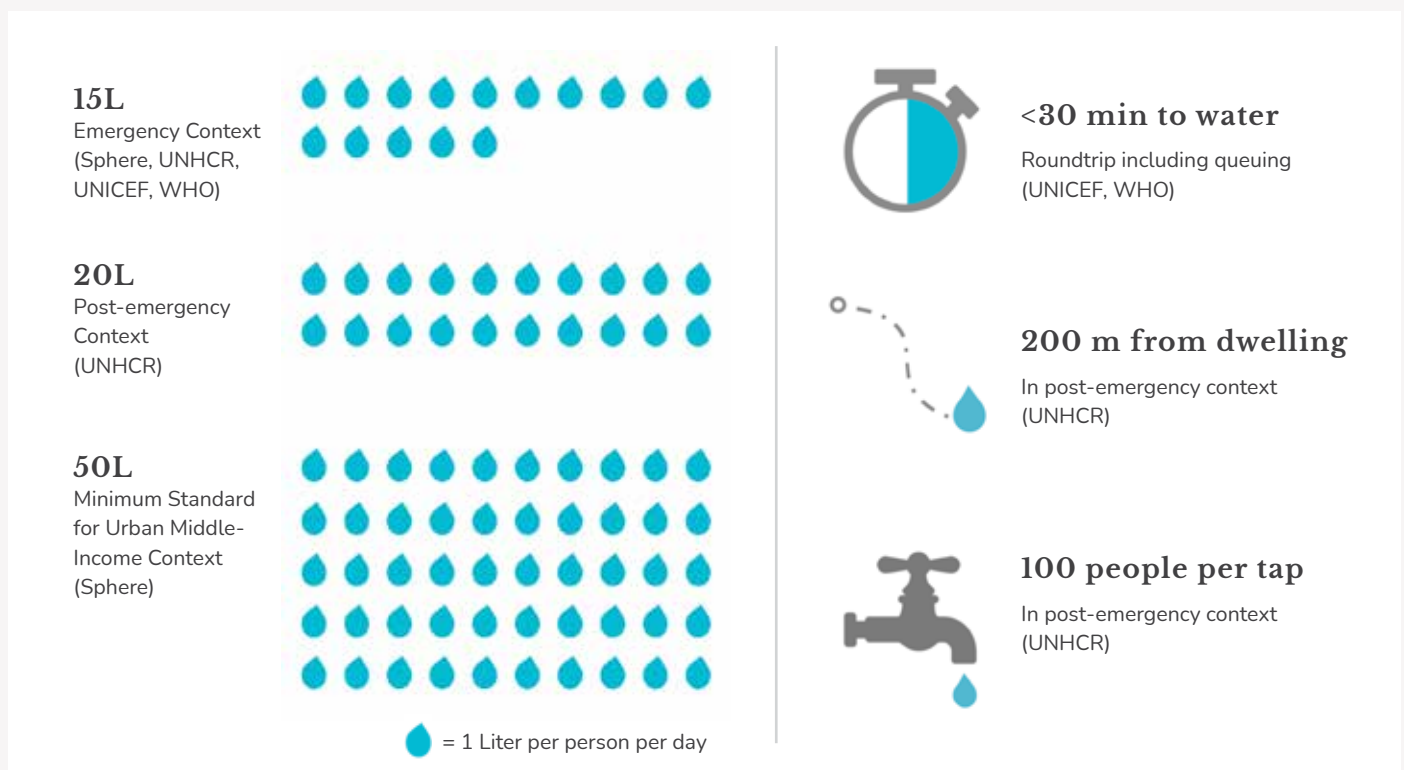
- Not more than 30 minutes for a roundtrip including queuing - UNICEF, WHO

International Minimum Standards for Distance to Water Source:

- 500 meters to dwelling (emergency context) - UNHCR
- 200 meters to dwelling (post-emergency context) - UNHCR

International Minimum Standards for Number of Persons sharing a Water Tap:

- 100 people per water tap (post-emergency context) - UNHCR



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Unh₂oused **Water** for All Initiative

Coalition on Homelessness San Francisco
March 2021