



UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER
FOR TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

TRIBAL ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER ACT OF 2023

Access to clean water is a human right. Clean water is foundational for human health, growing economies, and a basic level of support for communities. However, 48 percent of households on Native American reservations do not have clean water or adequate sanitation. Native American homes are 19 times more likely than white households to lack indoor plumbing.

Thanks to the sponsors of S. 2369 and H.R. 7632 in the 117th Congress, funding for safe drinking water systems for Tribal communities received a significant boost from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. While groundbreaking and long overdue, the funding now available for construction and repair of domestic water systems in Indian country is not a complete solution. Technical assistance is urgently needed to allow Tribes to plan and design the systems necessary to remedy the longstanding problem of lack of access to clean drinking water and bring those plans to the “shovel ready” stage where they can take advantage of available construction funding. In addition, Tribes need support to develop the managerial, financial, and regulatory capacity necessary for a fully functional and self-sustaining utility. Construction funding is not currently available to connect essential community facilities, like schools and clinics, to centralized water and sanitation, and this support is absolutely necessary to support a basic level of Tribal economic development. Finally, because Tribes cannot rely on the same types and volumes of revenue streams to support operation and maintenance of water systems, initial and temporary O&M assistance helps to ensure that the benefits of the historic investment in infrastructure are fully realized.

The Tribal Access to Clean Water Act of 2023 would address these gaps and fulfill the Federal Government’s trust obligation to provide clean and accessible water for Native communities.

Specifically, the bill would:

- Authorize the US Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, to make grants and loans for technical and financial assistance and for training, as well as for construction.
- Authorize increased funding for USDA’s Rural Development Community Facilities Grant and Loan Program of \$100 million per year for five years and provide \$30 million per year specifically for technical assistance, and ensure that Native communities are treated equitably and appropriately when considered for grants and loans.
- Authorize increased funding for existing programs of the Indian Health Service for technical assistance (\$150 million), water facilities for Native community facilities (\$100 million), and operation and maintenance assistance (\$500 million) (all over five years).
- Authorize \$90 million over five years for the Bureau of Reclamation’s existing Native American Affairs Technical Assistance Program.