

**Water Inequity**

Student name here

Student Number here

General Arts and Sciences, Georgian College

Communication Essentials, COMM 1016-30

Emily Cramer

February 11, 2023

## **Water Inequity**

Clean drinking water is not a luxury and access to it is not a privilege for most people living in the developed world. But for one group of Canadians, it is an elusive resource. Many people living on First Nations reserves across the country are unable to drink or bathe in water from the taps in their homes, and that is where piped water even exists. Lengthy boil advisories have been in place in some cases for more than twenty years. This problem is not merely the result of inadequate water systems but of the ongoing exclusion of Indigenous peoples and the failure to view their rights as equal, and related, to those of other Canadians. The government of Canada has a responsibility to provide clean drinking water to Indigenous reserves not only because access to water is a human right, but also because the lack of water is a direct result of racial marginalization and a failure to recognize that the well-being of one group of Canadians affects the well-being of all.

In 2010, the United Nations acknowledged that access to clean drinking water is a human right, and many other institutions support this definition: “According to both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, clean drinking water is a fundamental human right” (Erin, 2021, para. 1). In 2015, aware of a vast rights inequity to Indigenous Canadians, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed to ending all long-term drinking water advisories in Indigenous communities by March 2021. However, as of February 2022, there were still 38 advisories in place, and the government delayed the deadline to 2026 (Government of Canada, 2022). Canada has 20% of the world’s freshwater reserves, yet many Indigenous communities have gone without access to clean, potable water for decades. This obvious human rights violation should not be occurring in a developed nation, particularly one as committed to equity as Canada.

Why does this water shortage exist? The problem of water access on reserves has many causes, but it stems, at least in part, from the racial marginalization of First Nations people. “Indigenous exclusion... is the bedrock factor in maintaining Indigenous water insecurity” (Hanrahan, 2017, para. 4). Most Canadians benefit from strict government regulations over water supplies, but the Canadian government has been reluctant to extend those benefits to its Indigenous people. Often, reserves are in remote locations, and water treatment plants are required to service those areas. Where they exist, these plants have not been regulated to ensure safety. The resulting systems are not only faulty, they have been inadequately maintained due to a lack of funding. These problems have persisted for so long, minor maintenance is no longer possible; in some cases, total system overhauls are required to finally end boil advisories. To make matters worse, traditional water sources are not an alternative as they are often affected by pollution from high-population areas. “[Waterways have been] degraded by activities that occur far from reserves and traditional lands” (Assembly of First Nations, n.d., para. 7). The resulting potable water shortage on reserves points to the government’s racial marginalization of its First Nations people.

Yet in today’s global community, it is increasingly clear that marginalizing one group has an impact on everyone because of human interconnectedness. The struggles and successes of one affect all. Apart from obvious outcomes such as the impact on Canada’s health care system when people are exposed to unsafe drinking water, the health of Canada’s First Nations communities is important to the country in other ways. Indigenous contributions to environmental protection are significant: “Around the world, where Indigenous rights to their lands are strong, biodiversity, and climate-critical carbon stores are better protected” (Skene, 2020, para. 3). First Nations’ entrepreneurship has a profound impact on the Canadian economy: “Indigenous people represent

the fastest growth segment of the population [and are] a driving force of Canada's long-term economic stability" (Amanto, 2020, para. 1). Moreover, Indigenous culture plays a vital role in the diversity, history, and richness of Canadian culture. The interconnection between living things is emphasized in Indigenous teaching, and it provides a lesson that Western governments need to learn.

The scarcity of clean drinking water on many First Nations reserves in Canada is a stark reminder of ongoing racism and inequity within the country. No one should struggle to access water in a water-rich nation like Canada. This human rights breach points directly to the failure of the government to extend the same protections and funding to First Nations people that it does to the rest of Canada. And although this failure is the product of racial marginalization aimed at one group, its outcome affects all Canadians.

## References

- Amanto, D. (2020, June 18). Indigenous entrepreneurship in Canada: The impact and the opportunity. *RBC Royal Bank*. <https://discover.rbcroyalbank.com/indigenous-entrepreneurship-in-canada-the-impact-and-the-opportunity/>
- Erin, F. (2021). Clean drinking water for First Nations: Overview. *Canadian Points of View: Clean Drinking Water for First Nations*.
- Hanrahan, M. (2017). Water (in)security in Canada: National identity and the exclusion of Indigenous peoples. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30(1), 69-89. <https://doi-org.georgian.idm.oclc.org/10.3828/bjcs.2017.4>
- Assembly of First Nations. (n.d.). Honouring water. <https://www.afn.ca/honoring-water>
- Government of Canada. (2022). Short-term drinking water advisories. <https://sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1562856509704/1562856530304>
- Skene, J. (2020). Indigenous-led land protection is key to Canada's future. *NRDC*. <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/jennifer-skene/indigenous-led-land-protection-key-canadas-future>

### Attribution & Licensing:

"[Water Inequity: Student sample research essay](#)" by Emily Cramer is licensed under [CC-BY-NC 4.0](#) and provided as an example for students in the OER textbook [Communication Essentials for College](#)

Students: do not include this statement in your paper. This attribution relates to this specific essay example as it appears in the textbook.