

# Water Quality: A Public Health Concern

Health Equity Council

## Executive statement

Poor water quality has been an issue for many communities in Bernalillo County, especially those that are located south of Albuquerque. Poor water quality, due to spills and other forms of contamination, pose a threat to the environment and the health of the public. Contaminants contribute to a decline in sanitation, which exacerbate the spread of respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses, lead to a decline in environmental health, and lead to economic declines. Interventions for improving water levels and water quality require multiple intervention efforts that address Social Determinants of Health.

## Background

Poor water quality has been linked to chronic and acute diseases, negative effects within the environment, and a decline in economic health. Communities like Isleta Pueblo, a sovereign tribal reservation, and other communities of low socioeconomic status, mainly ones that are south of Albuquerque, have been negatively impacted by spills and other forms of contamination, such as runoff from stormwater, discharge from wastewater treatment plants (specifically into the Rio Grande River), lack of policies for industrial discharge, and others, that entered the Rio Grande and other bodies of water. Communities, like the ones in the Isleta Pueblo, that are most negatively impacted by such spills and contamination tend to be marginalized communities that are affected by a lower socioeconomic status or higher poverty rates, lower education, racial disparities, among other social determinants of health. Research has demonstrated that continual intake of contaminated water and food, that result from poor water quality is associated with a lower quality of life, higher death rates, lower median age, higher rates of disability, among other health risk factors. The impact from bigger cities, such as Albuquerque, demonstrates their responsibility to addressing social determinants of health that have historically led to the neglect and continual disadvantage of such communities.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** Update websites for the Water Utility Authority and the Environmental Health Department. Ensure websites portray pollution measures so that information is easily accessible for the community.

**Recommendation 2:** **clear,** Notification system. Deploy a county wide notification system that effectively targets communities that are more susceptible to negative effects from poor water quality.

**Recommendation 3:** Policy updates. Ensure policies are updated to prevent the discharge and encourage the treatment of pollutants of concern, such as contaminants that lead to negative health effects, among industries.

**Recommendation 4:** Stormwater system. Implement a more efficient stormwater system to capture contaminants from stormwater runoff and the continual contamination of bodies of water within and surrounding Albuquerque and Bernalillo County.