March 2024

hpio health policy institute of ohio

Health **Policy** Brief

Connections between water quality and health

Executive summary

Clean air and water, safe places to walk outside and access to healthy foods—conditions of our physical environment—all affect our health and well-being. However, not all Ohioans have equal access to healthy living conditions, including clean, uncontaminated water.

For example, rural and Appalachian communities have faced environmental degradation from agricultural and industrial practices, along with a lack of public resources to reduce health harms.

Additionally, because of historical and ongoing racist policies and practices, such as disinvestment, redlining and exclusionary zoning, Black, Indigenous and Latino communities have experienced negative environmental consequences from industrial, commercial and governmental policies and practices.

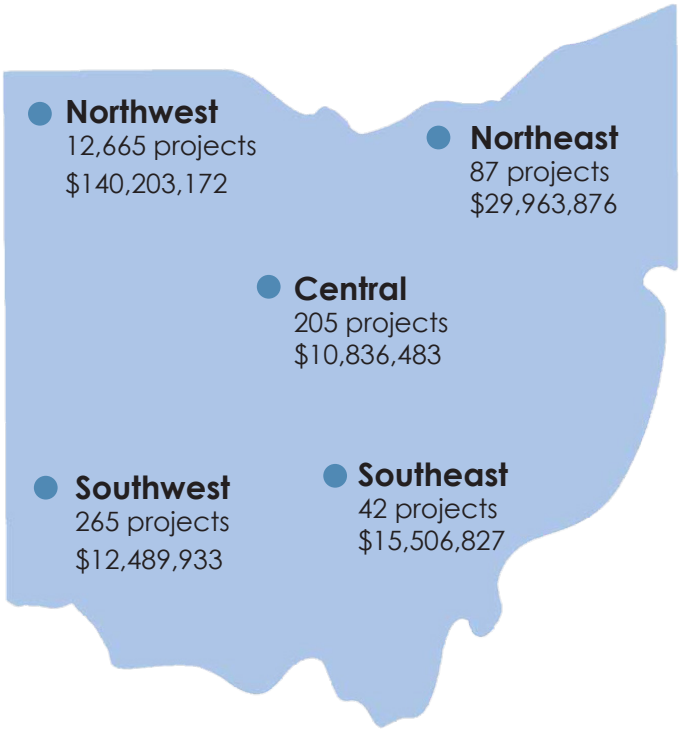
Based on measures of water quality and water infrastructure, Ohio received a C-minus rating in the American Society of Civil Engineers' 2021 Infrastructure Report.[1] This rating means that Ohio's water infrastructure is in fair or good condition, but shows signs of deterioration with increasing vulnerability to risk.

Still, Ohio has invested in water quality in recent years through efforts such as **H2Ohio** (a comprehensive water quality initiative working to strategically address Ohio's water quality challenges) and can build off these investments to continue improving Ohio's water, health and well-being. Figure ES.1. displays the amount of H2Ohio projects and funding in each region of the state, exemplifying Ohio's water quality investment.

3 key findings for policymakers

- **Improving water quality**, including a reduction in lead exposure, will lead to improved health for Ohioans.
- **There is a strong policy foundation** for Ohio policymakers to build on to improve water quality, such as investments in H2Ohio, and guard against new challenges.
- **State and local policymakers have opportunities to improve water quality,** such as increasing investment in water infrastructure, ecosystem restoration and evaluating the impact of industrial and commercial development.

Figure ES.1. **H2Ohio project funding and total projects by region, 2021-2023**



Notes: The figure includes H2Ohio projects and funding for lead service line inventorying, mapping and replacements; home sewage treatment system replacements; water and sewer infrastructure improvements; voluntary nutrient management plans; and wetland and floodplain reconnection and restoration. Funding amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar.
Source: H2Ohio Program

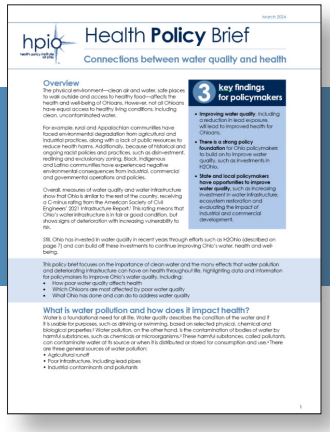
What can Ohio policymakers do to improve water quality?

Challenges related to water quality impact all areas of Ohio and states across the country. Addressing them requires action at the state, federal and local levels. Policymakers have many opportunities to build on the momentum of the current policy environment to strengthen Ohio's environmental protections, reduce the harms of poor water quality, prevent future risks and increase health equity at the state and local levels. Example policy recommendations are listed below.

Policy level	Example policy recommendation
State-level recommendation	State policymakers can create an **environmental legislative review process** to assess the environmental impact of actions by the General Assembly and state agencies, in addition to 1969 National Environmental Policy Act requirements. Indiana, for example, requires its state agencies to complete an environmental assessment and impact statement for specific types of projects. These assessments and statements are completed in consultation with each agency that has jurisdiction or special expertise.[2]
State- and local-level recommendation	State and local policymakers can leverage federal and state grants, such as those from the **Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill**, to map, inventory and replace lead service lines across the state. These maps can be used at the state and local level to strategically invest in service line replacements. Policymakers and other partners should focus on communities with the highest number of lead lines per population. Ohio can also set a goal for completion of the mapping process. The U.S. EPA provided **guidance** to states on developing and maintaining this inventory.
Local-level recommendation	Local policymakers can implement **multi-component groundwater management programs** to reduce groundwater pollution and improve water quality at the local level, especially in rural communities.

For more evidence-informed policy options, see full brief at

https://bit.ly/Ohio_water_quality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Overview

3 key findings for policymakers

What is water pollution and how does it impact health?

Notes

1. *2021 Report Card for Ohio's Infrastructure*. American Society of Civil Engineers, 2021. https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FullReport-OH_2021_smaller.pdf; *2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure: A Comprehensive Assessment of America's Infrastructure.* American Society of Civil Engineers, 2021. https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/National_IRC_2021-report.pdf
2. *Introducing Federal National Environmental Policy Act Practitioners to the Indiana Environmental Policy Act Process*. National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality, Department of Energy. https://ceq.doe.gov/docs/laws-regulations/state_information/IN_NEPA_Comparison_23Dec2015.pdf