Clean water is life. A necessity for human survival - it provides nourishment as humans need to be adequately hydrated so our physiological systems can function, and can prevent diseases such as cholera, hepatitis A, and typhoid (says the Aid & International Development Forum). However, our accessibility to clean water will become scarce as every two minutes, a water supply network (a system of engineered hydrologic and hydraulic components which provide water supply) breaks in the U.S, according to MSNBC. The implications for this are dangerous for the near future.

America’s water infrastructure is on the verge of collapse, but this isn’t new news, it just isn’t receiving attention. According to theNRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council), 30 million Americans have drunk water containing lead, and 5.5 million Americans have been drinking water that exceeds the EPA’s (U.S Environmental Protection Agency) maximum level (lead of 15 parts per billion in more than 10% of customer taps sampled).

At least 545 municipalities in the US have cast iron pipes that are at least 100 years old. These rusty pipes, which age every day, have cost America a lot of money and have brought unreliable water for many parts of the country.

Consequences of this have been seen with emergencies such as the public health crisis in Flint, Michigan, that lasted from 2014-2019. Their drinking water was contaminated with lead and possible Legionella bacteria, which can cause pneumonia.

One major reason why this situation has become dire is that repairs to the infrastructure have been continuously ignored. As a result, the already high cost of repairing the infrastructure has been increasing significantly as it worsens. The American Water Works Association now estimates that it could cost a trillion dollars to amend and revamp drinking water alone.

Another reason that there has been no effort to correct this dilemma is that, as journalist Wesley Lowery said, “Infrastructure’s not particularly sexy.” Working to fix infrastructure is not the most appealing or attractive initiative for a politician to take. This is also the reason why funding for improving the water infrastructure of the US is often redirected to funding more glamorous projectssuch as sports stadiums or other entertainment industry projects (such as amusement parks, cinemas, and casinos).

Whilst this situation is slowly creeping over an edge, many Black and Hispanic Americans have already suffered disproportionately. For example, Newark is mostly poor (32.6% of high school graduates and 52.0% of non-high school graduates live in poverty), with a large Black and Hispanic population (52% of population are Black, 33% of population are Latino/Hispanic), and their lead levels are among the highest in the US (2016 tests revealed 30 public schools with elevated water lead levels).

*“There is a close correlation between race and economics and whether or not you have clean water in the United States of America.”,* Wesley Lowery.

Action to improve America’s infrastructure is finally starting to be taken in the government. In March, President Biden announced ‘The American Jobs Plan’, a $2 trillion infrastructure plan that includes $111 billion to improve water systems. The plan includes a $45 billion investment to eliminate lead water pipes, $56 billion towards upgrading drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems, as well as $50 billion to improve infrastructure resilience. While the situation is currently grim, hope is on the horizon.