The World Health Organization (WHO) released fact sheets on drinking water and on sanitation in June 2019. In 2010, the WHO notes, the United Nations General Assembly “recognized the human right to water and sanitation.” But 785 million people in the world lack even “basic” drinking water service (meaning an improved source of water that can be collected “within a round trip of 30 minutes”). The WHO reminds us that “contaminated water and poor sanitation are linked to transmission of diseases” such as diarrhea, cholera, polio, and typhoid. With improved and more accessible water sources, “people spend less time and effort physically collecting it,” so “they can be productive in other ways.” Other advantages include lower medical costs, as well as healthier children with better school attendance. The WHO also reports that two billion people around the world “still do not have basic sanitation facilities such as toilets or latrines.”

WASHfunders.org continues as an information hub about water access, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and philanthropy’s role in that sector. Inga Ingulfsen of CANDID (which resulted from the Foundation Center and GuideStar merged) told Health Affairs. Grants for the site concluded, so CANDID funds the website’s upkeep out of its own budget. The hope was that the website would lead to creation of “a more organized group of [WASH] funders,” but that “didn’t end up materializing,” she said.

A small sampling of funding in water and sanitation follows.

**Water And Sanitation Efforts**

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene strategy sees unsafe sanitation as “a massive problem that is becoming more urgent as our global population increases and trends like water scarcity and urbanization intensify.” The funder’s website says that “poor sanitation…is widely accepted as a chief contributor to waterborne diseases.” It causes more than 1,200 children younger than age five to die per day, according to data cited by the funder. Initiatives under this strategy include “investing in technologies…that can radically change the way municipalities and households manage human waste affordably, at scale, and with little or no need for water and electricity.” One example is “reinvented” toilets, which are low cost and can be put in places that are hard for traditional infrastructure to reach. Some designs have new benefits, such as the ability to remove pathogens from human waste. Gates’s top priority for its Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene strategy is hastening the development of safe sanitation systems and technologies that do not require connections to sewers. It focuses its work on sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where the needs are greatest.

According to an August 2019 press release, the Gates Foundation awarded a $1 million grant to the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign “to evaluate the economic and environmental impact of sanitation systems under development” and to prioritize which research should be pursued by sanitation researchers and technology developers. The grantee also aims to help those investing in sanitation fund more effectively.

Household water insecurity (HHWI) is a “health equity crisis across the United States that is growing worse with climate change,” according to an RWJF summary of its $350,000 grant to the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. Both low quality and low quantity of water lead to water insecurity. The RWJF notes that HHWI contributes to certain infections worldwide. Climate change decreases water quality, damages the infrastructure, causes community relocation, and makes it more difficult for rural commu-
nities to get funding to address their water and sanitation needs. This grant, awarded in July 2019 and focused on rural Alaska Native communities that do not have piped water, aims to assess how the Portable Alternative Sanitation System (PASS) addresses HHWI, climate change, and health. Affordable household PASS units provide “running treated water, 100-gallons of water storage capacity, a separating (dry) toilet and a urinal,” and more. Additional PASS units will be installed in two Alaska Native communities “imminently threatened by climate change.”

The Poul Due Jensen Foundation (PDJF), a corporate funder in Denmark, is funding Water Mission, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), for the Kenya 23—Next Level initiative. This effort focuses on “strengthening existing safe water projects, addressing long-term sustainability, and providing safe water access to approximately 55,000 people” in several communities of this African country, according to a July 2019 post on Water Mission’s blog. Many of those people “will have water systems installed for the first time.” In its Water funding area, the PDJF collaborates with experienced NGOs with the aim of providing “access to safe drinking water for the world’s poorest in rural communities and forgotten refugee camps,” according to its website. The PDJF requires that these projects and programs be “environmentally, socially and financially sustainable.”

The Nonpublic Household Water Well Project at the University of Kansas School of Medicine–Wichita (KUSM-W) received a three-year grant (now concluded) from the Kansas Health Foundation. “Contamination of nonpublic water wells is far too common, and most well users are unaware [when] their water is not safe,” the grantee’s website explains. KUSM-W, in partnership with the Public Health Law Center, developed recommendations on how to “provide increased protections for Kansans” using such wells for household purposes. The project team made eighteen policy recommendations and presented them to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Kansas Water Office, and others. KUSM-W used remaining grant funds to test and analyze more nonpublic wells.

In 2019 the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation’s Safe Water Initiative awarded $15.5 million in grants. The initiative’s goal is to “accelerate access to safe, reliable, and affordable water services” for households, health care facilities, and schools “across six countries in sub-Saharan Africa,” program officer Andrea Jones told Health Affairs. The initiative—active for some thirty years—uses the local administrative level, such as a town, “to test new models and implement approaches that aim for sustainability and build the evidence base for replication” and scaling later. One part of the funder’s strategy is to “build the evidence base for solutions and address key knowledge gaps” to “influence policy, practice and investments” nationally and globally, the funder’s website says. Another is to advance both proven and promising solutions and models.

In March 2019 the Hilton Foundation awarded $7.5 million to the Millennium Water Alliance for an initiative aiming to obtain safe water for three districts in Ethiopia. Implementing partners, including CARE, Catholic Relief Services, and WaterAid, have provided matching funds. One key objective is achieving WASH services for schools and health care facilities.

Other Funders

The Caterpillar Foundation, a corporate funder, funds water projects under its Basic Needs focus area. The Coca-Cola Foundation continues to fund the ongoing Replenish Africa Initiative (RAIN), which will provide safe water access to six million people in Africa by 2020’s end. Thus far it has provided $29 million of its $35 million commitment to RAIN. The af Jochnick Foundation, based in Liechtenstein and not now accepting applications, funds Water.org for its work on access to improved water and sanitation in Indonesia.

The Kresge Foundation’s Environment program has a Climate Resilient and Equitable Water Systems initiative. In 2018 Kresge funded the Hip Hop Caucus for its continued participation in the Clean Water for All Campaign. This grantee serves Washington, D.C. In 2021, after some strategic planning, the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, which funds in Maine, will resume funding projects to support healthy land and water as part of its Healthy People Healthy Places program. Clean water and sanitation both are under the Health issue area for the Skoll Foundation, according to its website.

Key Personnel Changes

SUE DESMOND-HELLMANN, CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has decided to step down after more than five years. In a December 2019 press release, she said that this was “the toughest decision” of her career. Desmond-Hellmann concluded “that she could not adequately meet the demands of the position while caring for her own health and her family’s needs,” the release explained. Mark Suzman, the funder’s president of Global Policy and Advocacy and chief strategy officer, has been promoted to CEO.

DAVID FUKUZAWA, managing director of the Kresge Foundation’s Health Program, plans to retire in 2020 after working at this national funder for twenty years, according to an October 2019 press release. “David recognized the undeniable impact that housing, education and the environment had on individual and community health,” Kresge’s president and CEO, Rip Rapson, said in the release. Fukuzawa championed the elevation of those intersections and helping “communities provide safe, affordable housing, fresh food, clean air and primary care to support healthy communities.” Eventually, Fukuzawa focused the Kresge program on social determinants of health.

Compiled and written by Lee L. Prina, senior editor