



Lacking Water Infrastructure and High Water Costs

When homes have older water infrastructure containing lead, accessing safe water to drink can be costly.

Linda Thomas is a Chicago resident living in the West Woodlawn neighborhood on the south side of the city. Linda lives with her daughter and grandchild. When she learned about the lead in water crisis in Flint, Michigan, she began thinking of water safety in her own home.

Linda had been using bottled water for drinking and cooking in her home since 2008, after a plumber identified a lead service line at her home. She decided to complete a partial lead service line replacement. Even after the replacement, however, Linda was still concerned about the safety of her water and continued to use bottled water.

“The health and welfare of my grandchildren – that was my primary concern. And anyone visiting who was going to have a glass of water or a cup of coffee.”

In Spring 2023, Linda decided to participate in a water testing and filtration program with Elevate and [Blacks in Green](#), thinking of the impacts of lead in water for her daughter and grandchild. Through the program, Linda had

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her water tested for lead, and an under-the-sink filtration system was installed. Linda’s initial water tests showed elevated levels of lead at 9.19 parts per billion (ppb). After the filtration system was installed lead levels were reduced to an undetectable amount, which made her water safe to drink directly from the tap.

“Talking through it with the team eased some of my preliminary fears. You need to talk with someone who understands these old houses – they’re over 100 years old, and if you mess with the plumbing or pipe you think anything could happen. They were very patient and explained the process before they did the install.”



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Transitioning to drinking filtered tap water has eliminated the need for expensive bottled water deliveries. Linda had been paying about \$42 a month for water to be delivered to her home - to date she has paid over \$7,000 for bottled water over the last 15 years. With her new filtration system, she will be saving at least \$30 a month, or \$360 a year. In addition to the cost savings, Linda has found using tap water with the new filtration system to

be much more convenient and normal for everyday activities.

Reflecting on her lead service line replacement, Linda emphasized the importance of taking immediate action and recommends others do the same. "I would just suggest that anyone who has the opportunity to replace it to go ahead and replace it. I hope what I went through helps someone else make the decision to do it."

Want to Learn More?

Elevate works with municipalities and water utilities to research water affordability challenges and explore strategies for tackling the challenges in those communities. Visit ElevateNP.org/Water-Affordability to learn more about our latest research.