

#careforflint Manifesto

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan is a public health disaster that has affected tens of thousands of people. Most estimates place the number of children who have been exposed to elevated levels of lead in their water at around ten thousand people. Additionally, 87 people have been affected by Legionnaires' disease, a disease which can be carried by contaminated water and may also be linked to the water crisis. Governor Rick Snyder has since declared a state of emergency, as has President Obama. Clearly the water crisis in Flint is a man-made catastrophe but how did it come about and what can be done about it?

In an effort to save money the city of Flint decided to stop buying their water from Detroit and instead join a water system that was being built to supply the county. This system would draw from Lake Huron, just like Detroit. However, while the system was being built Flint chose to draw water from the Flint River rather than continue paying for Detroit's water. City officials failed to properly test and treat the water which was more corrosive than normal. Much of the existing water system of Flint is made with lead pipes and as these pipes were corroded by the water, lead particles were present in higher amounts in the water than before switching to the Flint river. The local and likely the state government downplayed the incident causing thousands to have to wait for the help they needed.

As is often the case with medical issues, children are more easily affected by lead poisoning than adults are. The problems associated with lead poisoning are debilitating and irreversible. Many of the symptoms of lead poisoning are related to a child's mental and physical development. Children who are affected by lead poisoning suffer physically as their bones and muscles develop slowly or

not at all. Lead poisoning also has a profound impact on developing brains. Even when exposed to relatively low concentrations of lead and having little of it in the blood, children often score more poorly on tests and are more likely to be classified as having a learning disability. At high levels of lead in the bloodstream mental function is severely diminished and behavioral problems can arise. The CDC National Center for Environmental Health estimates the cost of an individual with severe lead poisoning at about half a million dollars in special education and juvenile justice costs. Lead poisoning is an expensive condition and the costs are numerous, from healthcare to a decrease in lifetime earnings. One study by Elise Gould suggests that each dollar spent on preventing lead poisoning can result in a return of \$17-221.

The crisis in Flint will be expensive to fix. The city hopes to start work on a plan to replace lead service pipes with copper ones. The cost of that alone could run upwards of fifty million dollars. The city is also providing water filters and water bottles for the families that have been affected by the water crisis. While improving the infrastructure of the water system is a good step towards resolving the issue, it ignores the existing human cost. Thousands of children are permanently handicapped and many adults have become sick as well. We believe that the government should provide free healthcare to those affected by the Flint water crisis. Lead poisoning is an ongoing condition and expecting complete coverage of all complications would be a bit excessive to expect but we believe that the government should at least pay for free blood testing for lead for all citizens of Flint and should set up health clinics throughout the city to assist those suffering from lead poisoning. We are going to include a petition on the webpage that we will create that asks for these and other health services for the citizens of Flint to be covered at no cost to those citizens. Currently the federal government has declared a state of emergency which allows for up to five million dollars in federal funding to relief but they cannot provide more as the Flint disaster is man-made,

not a natural disaster. This petition will be for additional funding to continue to cover the medical costs of a city where nearly half of the people live in poverty and need this help.

We decided to name the campaign #careforflint because the name is catchy, easy to memorize and a call for people to take action. It can be associated with healthcare as well as caring about what happened to the people of Flint. People who are aware of the events will likely be able to link the name to the crisis. The name can be used as a hashtag on social media and thereby create awareness of our campaign. For the logo we decided to stick to a typographical design instead of creating a pictorial one as to have no confusion or misinterpretation of what the campaign is about.

The choice of using wix.com for creating the website was based on the recommendation of a group member who was already familiar with the site. We valued that wix.com offers a variety of templates and the creative freedom to modify them easily to fit one's own needs. The design of the homepage is especially crucial since that is where visitors get their first impression from. The homepage will give an overview of the information that can be accessed on some of the different subpages of the website so that visitors will quickly know what to expect. A navigation bar will be installed in the top right hand corner and a drop-down menu will show the subpages when resting the cursor on one of the categories (for the sitemap refer to appendix 1). However, several of the pages will not only be accessible over the navigation bar, but also linked to from other elements featured on the website, for example a box portraying the progress of the petition and asking people to sign it will be featured on the right side of the homepage as well as some other pages (for the wireframes refer to appendix 2). A short summary of our goals will also be presented on the homepage and link to the respective page upon clicking on "Read more". Another feature

on the homepage will be a short video about the events in Flint. We realize the potential of audio-visual material and think that a video might help to draw in a number of people and get them to sign the petition. However, all the information we want to provide visitors with can also be accessed in written format on the other pages of the website.

We believe that if we want to get as many people as possible to sign the petition, it will be important to give people an overview of what events led up to the water crisis and how people's health got impacted. For that reason the "About"-section of the website will not only feature "Our Goal", but also "Background" and "Health Concerns". It is crucial that the texts contain all the relevant content that we want our visitors to know about, but are not too long to discourage people from even starting to read. While the "Background"-section of the website will be updated once crucial events occur, visitors can get information about different recent events related to the Flint water crisis by visiting the blog. The first sentences of the two most recent blog posts will be presented on the bottom of the homepage with a "Read More" button linking to the complete blog post. The blog can also be accessed via the navigation bar as can be the "Get Active" section. That section will be split into two parts, the first one being the petition that our campaign is based on. On the page titled "Petition" will be a description of the petition as well as an overview of the progress. To access the actual petition, visitors will have to click a link leading them to [change.org](https://www.change.org). The other page under "Get Active" will be titled "Events". It will be used to inform about events like protests related to the Flint water crisis that people can attend. Having people supporting our campaign attend public events is a good possibility to spread awareness of our campaign and get more people to sign the petition. To reach even more people we will spread the petition via a Facebook page and a Twitter account that we will be creating. We can share the pages with our

friends but also reach out to others campaigning for Flint and ask them to share our petition on their social media feed, although we have no guarantee for them agreeing to do so.

As far as the aesthetics of our website are concerned, we decided to go with a blue and white color scheme. White creates associations of cleanliness and purity and blue is often associated with water. Since clean drinking water is what we wish for the people of Flint, we considered this color scheme would create an appropriate atmosphere on our website. We chose a font and a website template that created a neat and organized website that is easily readable and does not distract from the content. We also want to feature photos on our website that show the situation in Flint. Those images will probably look unpleasing and therefore stand in contrast to the soothing atmosphere that we try to create on our website. However, we believe that photos are powerful and having this kind of contrast can increase engagement with our website, as we might be seen as a source of hope in that horrible time.

Works Cited

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