



CWN's History (and who we are today)

Canadian Water Network (CWN) was created in 2001 as a federally-funded Network of Centres of Excellence. Around this time, there was growing recognition within government and across the broader water sector that protecting environmental and public health required better uptake of research knowledge to inform water management actions and decisions. CWN's formation was further influenced by the drinking water tragedy in Walkerton, Ontario in May 2000 that caused six deaths and sickened more than 2,000 people.

CWN's original mandate was to connect leading research on Canada's most challenging freshwater issues with decision makers who could put this knowledge into practice. As a Network of Centres of Excellence, CWN was hosted at the University of Waterloo, led by a Scientific Director and governed by a Board of Directors.

From 2001 to 2017, CWN administered and managed more than \$61.5 million in federal funding and attracted an additional \$45 million in co-investments from the private sector and other levels of government. CWN fostered multi-disciplinary collaboration within the research community and connected end users to projects, which led to improved water quality, reduced risks to public health, hundreds of millions in cost savings, and more than 100 policy and practice changes.

Encouraged by these early successes but recognizing the limitations of the traditional research model, CWN saw an opportunity and a need to further support Canadian communities in addressing complex water management challenges. Over time, CWN began piloting a series of research consortia that would place end user needs front and centre — enabling them to not only connect with researchers but also access knowledge and insights that were relevant and framed in a way to usefully inform decisions. The Pathogens in Groundwater Research Consortium (2007-2010), Canadian Watershed Research Consortium (2010-2015) and Canadian Municipal Water Consortium (2008-current) brought together end users from federal, provincial and municipal government and industry across the country to respond to priority challenges identified by end user communities.

CWN's focus on end user needs as a starting point for research collaboration was groundbreaking for its time. The consortia provided unique value for participants and revealed an appetite for continued leadership within this evolving space to address the needs of the water management community. Recognizing this opportunity, CWN underwent a gradual transition to a new organizational model that would leverage its existing connections and knowledge to expand a user-focused approach beyond the end of federal funding in 2017.



Today, CWN is an independent and self-sustaining nonprofit led by a CEO. Our purpose is to help communities get to the future they want by accelerating, advancing and improving water management decisions. We are driven by the need for aligned and meaningful connections across the water sector and beyond — particularly other sectors with related and adjacent interests — to achieve progress on complex environmental, social and economic challenges.

CWN initiatives create value in the form of curated knowledge and actionable insights that recognize the realities surrounding local decisions. Convening decision makers, knowledge generators and solution providers to drive progress on challenges that involve water management is critical to our work. Elements of our roots remain, including a strong national network of experts and practitioners, but our scope has expanded far beyond our original mandate of funding water research.

CWN is supported by the end users and decision makers in both the public and private sectors who rely on the insights we provide and the connections we enable. Revenue sources include fees from Municipal Consortium members, as well as contribution agreements and project-based contracts with government and industry.

As the Canadian water landscape evolves and national, regional and local priorities shift, CWN is at the forefront of identifying opportunities where progress can be made and aligned efforts can have the most value, as well as what insights can help decision makers move forward.

Learn more about some of CWN's recent initiatives and collaborations:

- [COVID-19 Wastewater Coalition](#) — a national collaboration of municipalities, utilities, researchers, public health agencies and governments to share knowledge on the application of wastewater-based epidemiology for SARS-CoV-2 in Canada
- [COVID-19 Strategic Sharing Group](#) — national discussions, held weekly during 2020, for utility leaders from across Canada to plan, prioritize and respond to the pandemic
- [Improving Flood Risk Evaluation through Cross-Sector Sharing of Richer Data](#) — a pilot project with the Insurance Bureau of Canada to examine how results for pluvial hazard maps derived from large-scale risk models are different (and to what degree) when richer datasets are used.
- [Canada's Challenges and Opportunities to Address Contaminants in Wastewater](#) — a review (led by a national expert panel) that culminated in a Blueprint for Federal Action on known and emerging contaminants in municipal wastewater