

4 KEY FINDINGS

Recent national research reveals how water utility customers perceive tap water quality and affordability.

THE TAKEAWAY

Quality is the starting point for affordability messaging. Specific, data-backed proof points can build trust and move tap skeptics toward acceptance.

1

SENSORY DRIVERS & THE POWER OF RIGOR

- Taste, smell, and clarity dominate initial quality perception.
- Communications highlighting testing frequency and treatment rigor significantly elevate customer confidence.

2

THE GOLDEN RULE: PAIR AFFORDABILITY WITH QUALITY

- Quality messaging can stand alone, but affordability messaging must always include a quality component.
- When customers hear about low cost alone, they ask: “Is the water actually safe?”

3

AVOID SPECIFIC HARD NUMBERS ON COST

- “Pennies a day” and comparisons to “streaming subscriptions” can backfire.
- Frame affordability against general household expenses or contrast the high cost of daily bottled water with tap water.

4

SPECIFICITY & SCIENTIFIC IMAGERY BUILD TRUST

- Customers respond best to clear, quantifiable proof points such as 100 times per month, 24/7 monitoring and testing for 90+ contaminants.
- Scientific and treatment facility imagery reinforces credibility.

MESSAGING FRAMEWORKS

Recent national research reveals how water utility customers perceive tap water quality and affordability. This framework organizes affordability messaging around two connected tracks. Together, the tracks position clean, clear, great-tasting tap water as both reliable and within reach, with quality serving as the starting point for every affordability message.

A quality-focused track that builds trust through expectations, testing rigor, contaminant protection, and transparency

An affordability-focused track that shows value by comparing tap water costs, reinforcing quality, and connecting eligible customers with assistance.

Shared Starting Point

Clean, clear, great-tasting tap water customers can trust and afford.

Quality-Focused Track	Affordability-Focused Track
Expectation Baseline Set the promise: clean, clear, great-tasting water free from anything that does not belong in the glass.	Value & Quality Hook Start with the idea that high-quality tap water should be within reach for everyone.
Testing Rigor Show proof through local expertise, 100 tests per month, and 24/7 monitoring.	Broad Cost Comparison Position tap water as a fraction of bottled alternatives and more affordable than many household expenses.
Barriers & Contaminants Name what the system protects against, including bacteria, heavy metals, pesticides, microplastics, and PFAS.	Quality Anchor Reinforce that affordability does not come at the expense of quality, testing, or monitoring.
Transparency & Link Build credibility by pointing customers to published test results and quality standards.	Assistance Outreach Close with practical support for qualified households that may need help with bills.

SAY THIS NOT THAT

A practical guide for communicating affordability with clarity, credibility and customer trust.

SAY THIS

NOT THAT

TESTING FREQUENCY

Tested 100 times per month or 3–4 times per day
24/7 continuous monitoring

Tested daily OR 25 times per week
Tested once every 6–8 hours

CONTAMINANTS & RIGOR

Tested for over 90 contaminants, including PFAS,
microplastics, heavy metals, and bacteria
Testing for contaminants beyond federal requirements

“Tap water is one of the most regulated products
in America...” (without data points)

DESCRIBING WATER QUALITY

The water is...

- Pure
- Natural

The water is...

- Artesian
- Sustainable

COST & AFFORDABILITY

Costs a fraction of bottled water (~\$1/day)
Keeps bills below other household expenses
High-quality water affordable for everyone

Tap water costs pennies a day
Costs less than your streaming subscription

TRANSPARENCY & SAFETY

Results published openly for complete
transparency

“If something ever falls short of standards...”

BOTTLED WATER COMPARISON

Focus on tap’s value, convenience, and low cost
compared to bottled water

64% of bottled water is just repackaged tap water

VISUAL IMAGERY

Lab technicians and scientists
Water testing equipment and clean treatment
facilities

Generic shots of people drinking water
Abstract or purely decorative nature graphics