



# JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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### NATIONAL AGENCIES CLARIFY WATER QUALITY TESTING METHODOLOGIES

*Belize City, November 27, 2025* – The Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB), Belize Water Services Limited (BWS), and the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoHW) held a joint press conference today to clarify differences in the methodologies used to assess water quality in Belize following the recent release of water quality test results from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS7).

The MICS is an international household survey programme developed and supported by UNICEF. It is designed to generate estimates for key indicators that assess the well-being of children and women. Since its inception in the 1990's, the MICS has been implemented in more than 120 countries. Belize has participated in four of the seven survey rounds to date.

The MICS7 included a Water Quality Testing (WQT) module, which was developed under the WHO/ UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme. This module is designed to assess the quality of water at two critical points: the source (where it is collected) and the point of consumption (where it is actually drunk). The primary goal of this module is to measure the safety of water as it is consumed by households. To ensure the integrity of the testing process, a six-day training was conducted by a WHO expert for field staff responsible for sample collection. Furthermore, both the pilot and main data collection phases were monitored by a water quality expert from the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology to ensure proper administration of the testing kits.

As the global standard for monitoring Sustainable Development Goal 6 (ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all), the WQT module has been implemented in over 50 countries. Its inclusion in Belize's MICS7 allows for a more comprehensive understanding of environmental health risks, particularly those affecting children and women, and provides critical data to inform national policies on water safety and public health.

At today's press conference, representatives from the three agencies outlined their respective roles and testing methodologies used to monitor water safety across the country. BWS conducts daily water quality tests at its production facilities and within its distribution system at designated sampling taps countrywide to ensure water leaving the utility meets required standards. In parallel, the Ministry of Health and Wellness also performs regulatory monitoring, analyzing about 4,000 water samples each year from BWS systems, basic water systems, and bottled water operations across Belize.

Each testing system serves a distinct and complementary purpose. Utility testing verifies the quality of water as it leaves the source, regulatory testing ensures compliance with public health standards, and household surveys such as the MICS assess the quality of water at the point of use. Together, these approaches form a comprehensive framework for monitoring water safety, from treatment to final consumption.

While the MICS7 results indicate that *E. coli* was present in 29.8% of water samples at the point of collection (the source, such as storage containers within the household, rainwater vats, tap or refillable water bottle) and in 33.7% of samples at the point of consumption (the water actually consumed by household members), the agencies



emphasized that water quality can deteriorate due to storage and handling practices within homes, regardless of the initial quality at the source. These findings align with global research and underscore the need for heightened awareness and public education on household water safety.

The MOHW representative reinforced the importance of proper hygiene practices in storing and handling drinking water and shared practical recommendations for households to reduce contamination risks.

The agencies agree that each monitoring system provides important information for understanding and improving water safety in Belize. The MICS7 results and other MICS data will be available to the public through the Statistical Institute of Belize.

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