

From public to planetary health: a manifesto

This manifesto for transforming public health calls for a social movement to support collective public health action at all levels of society—personal, community, national, regional, global, and planetary. Our aim is to respond to the threats we face: threats to human health and wellbeing, threats to the sustainability of our civilisation, and threats to the natural and human-made systems that support us. Our vision is for a planet that nourishes and sustains the diversity of life with which we coexist and on which we depend. Our goal is to create a movement for planetary health.

Our audience includes health professionals and public health practitioners, politicians and policy makers, international civil servants working across the UN and in development agencies, and academics working on behalf of communities. Above all, our audience includes every person who has an interest in their own health, in the health of their fellow human beings, and in the health of future generations.

The discipline of public health is critical to this vision because of its values of social justice and fairness for all, and its focus on the collective actions of interdependent and empowered peoples and their communities. Our objectives are to protect and promote health and wellbeing, to prevent disease and disability, to eliminate conditions that harm health and wellbeing, and to foster resilience and adaptation. In achieving these objectives, our actions must respond to the fragility of our planet and our obligation to safeguard the physical and human environments within which we exist.

Planetary health is an attitude towards life and a philosophy for living. It emphasises people, not diseases, and equity, not the creation of unjust societies. We seek to minimise differences in health according to wealth, education, gender, and place. We support knowledge as one source of social transformation, and the right to realise, progressively, the highest attainable levels of health and wellbeing.

Our patterns of overconsumption are unsustainable and will ultimately cause the collapse of our civilisation. The harms we continue to inflict on our planetary systems are a threat to our very existence as a species. The gains made in health and wellbeing over recent centuries, including through public health actions, are not irreversible; they can easily be lost, a lesson we have failed to learn from

previous civilisations. We have created an unjust global economic system that favours a small, wealthy elite over the many who have so little.

The idea of unconstrained progress is a dangerous human illusion: success brings new and potentially even more dangerous threats. Our tolerance of neoliberalism and transnational forces dedicated to ends far removed from the needs of the vast majority of people, and especially the most deprived and vulnerable, is only deepening the crisis we face. We live in a world where the trust between us, our institutions, and our leaders, is falling to levels incompatible with peaceful and just societies, thus contributing to widespread disillusionment with democracy and the political process.

An urgent transformation is required in our values and our practices based on recognition of our interdependence and the interconnectedness of the risks we face. We need a new vision of cooperative and democratic action at all levels of society and a new principle of planetism and wellbeing for every person on this Earth—a principle that asserts that we must conserve, sustain, and make resilient the planetary and human systems on which health depends by giving priority to the wellbeing of all. All too often governments make commitments but fail to act on them; independent accountability is essential to ensure the monitoring and review of these commitments, together with the appropriate remedial action.

The voice of public health and medicine as the independent conscience of planetary health has a special part to play in achieving this vision. Together with empowered communities, we can confront entrenched interests and forces that jeopardise our future. A powerful social movement based on collective action at every level of society will deliver planetary health and, at the same time, support sustainable human development.

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