



Sustainability

New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine Policy Statement

Policy Statement

The New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (NZCPHM) affirms that a healthy environment is a key foundation for the health and wellbeing of people, and thus environmental sustainability is core to population health. Public Health Medicine has a responsibility to lead in this area due to its role in addressing the broader determinants of health. The NZCPHM will foster a culture of environmental sustainability and encourage leadership in sustainability throughout the organisation, its Fellows, health and other sectors.

Background

Ecosystem damage compromises our access to fundamental pre-requisites for human health and survival: safe water, clean air, safe food and shelter. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported in 2016 that environmental determinants underpin 23% of global deaths and 26% of deaths among children under five. Environmental factors underpin 22% of the world's disease burden in terms of years of healthy life lost (DALYS).¹

Sustainability is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.² Achieving sustainability means ensuring that all people have the essential resources (such as food and water) to support their health and human rights, while ensuring that our use of resources does not stress critical ecosystem processes.³ There are models which help conceptualise an approach to global sustainability, for example the model in Figure 1 which shows both the resources people need and the effects of unsustainable development.⁴

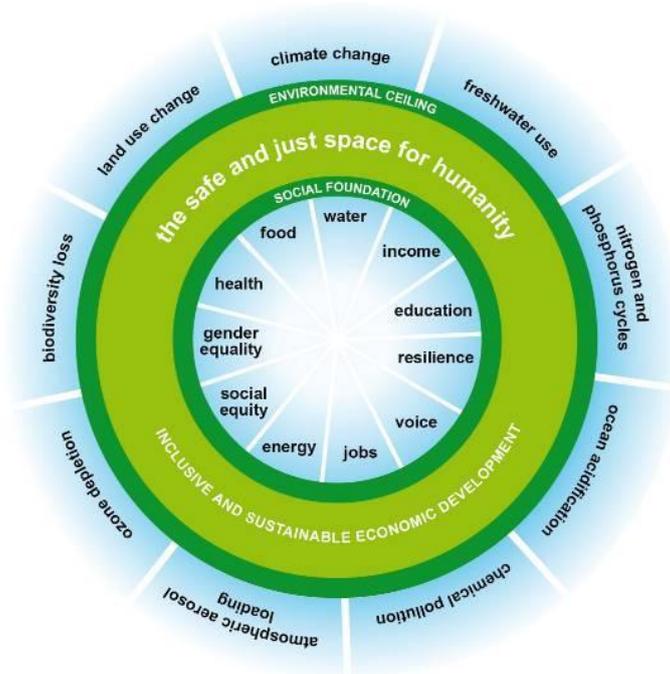


Figure 1. A safe and just space for humanity to thrive in.^{3,4}

In Figure 1, the social foundation forms an inner boundary, below which are many dimensions of human deprivation. The environmental ceiling forms an outer boundary, beyond which are many dimensions of environmental degradation. Between the two boundaries lies an area which represents an environmentally safe and socially just space for humanity to thrive in. It is also the space in which inclusive and sustainable economic development takes place.

The relationship between sustainable development and human health/wellbeing is recognised in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all countries in 2015, and described as a plan for ‘people and the planet’. Good health and wellbeing form one of the SDGs, and many of the other goals address sustainability in the areas of production, consumption, and the management of natural resources, as well as urgent action on climate change.⁵

Environmental sustainability and health equity

Poor quality environments and climate change have greater adverse impacts on the health and human rights of disadvantaged groups including children, indigenous peoples, older people and developing nations.^{1,6-9} Māori and other indigenous peoples’ world views, knowledge and practices can inform global sustainable practice and development. The 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognises that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices, contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment.¹⁰

Sustainability in the Health Sector

The health sector has a very large impact on the environment through energy use, transport, waste, and the procurement and use of resources. For example, it is estimated that the health sector is responsible for about 3-8% of developed countries’ total GHG emissions.¹¹

The central ideas of sustainability – not using too much and doing more with less – not only help to protect the environmental determinants of health, but also align with health sector goals to improve efficiency, and to reduce health care costs.

Quality improvement, improved staff satisfaction, health equity improvement, and greater health sector resilience are also possible co-benefits of enacting environmental sustainability within the health sector.¹²⁻¹⁷ Addressing environmental variables, such as urban design, transport, and housing can also help to reduce the burden of chronic disease (e.g. obesity, diabetes, respiratory disease), and reduce demand on scarce health resources.¹⁸

The NZCPHM encourages NZ health sector organisations to measure and reduce their impact on the environment. Useful resources for the sector include:

- [NHS England Sustainable Development Unit](#)
- [Global Green and Health Hospitals Network](#)
- [The Royal NZ College of General Practitioners Greening General Practice toolkit](#)

Sustainable Practice by Public Health Professionals

The NZCPHM encourages its members to: support societal efforts to follow a sustainable development path; challenge un-sustainable practices; and champion sustainable health care. Additionally individual health professionals can take personal action to promote sustainability in the areas of energy use, transport, food, waste, and carbon reduction, including actions outlined in:

- Individual Action Checklist, Pg 25, UK Faculty of Public Health 'Sustaining a Healthy Future' http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/r_sustaining_a_healthy_future.pdf
- Section 3.3.6 of the NZCPHM Climate Change Policy Statement http://www.nzcp hm.org.nz/media/85321/2016_05_03._nzcp hm_climate_change_substantive_policy_final_.pdf

Sustainability by the NZCPHM

The NZCPHM commits to fostering a culture of environmental sustainability and to encouraging leadership in sustainability throughout the organisation, its Fellows, health and other sectors. Actions to be undertaken to improve the sustainability of the NZCPHM as an organisation are outlined in the NZCPHM Sustainability Action Plan (link)

Links with other NZCPHM policies

Climate Change
Health Equity
Housing
Māori Health

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Adopted by Council: May 2017