



The context of public health and NZCPHM policy statements

New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine

Public health is the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health through the organised efforts of society.¹

Public health has historically been the main cause of improvements in human health.² Advances in public health in the last 100 years, such as vaccination, control of infectious diseases through clean water and improved sanitation, and the recognition of tobacco use as a health hazard, have led to improvements in health and wellbeing, and a substantial increase in life expectancy.³

The NZCPHM represents the medical speciality of public health medicine in New Zealand. Public health medicine is defined as the branch of medicine concerned with the epidemiological analysis of the health and health care of populations and population groups. It involves assessing population health and health care needs, developing policy and strategy, undertaking health promotion, controlling and preventing disease, and organising services. Public health is focused on achieving health equity across ethnic, socioeconomic, age, ability, and cultural groups, and promoting environments in which everyone can be healthy.⁴

Public health medicine specialists have a professional responsibility to act as advocates for health for everyone in society.⁵⁻⁷ For this reason, the NZCPHM advocates for and supports evidence-informed⁷ equity-enhancing⁸ policies for health and wellbeing that accord with te Tiriti o Waitangi, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and health promotion and Health in All Policies approaches, recognising that each of these is grounded in the societal,¹ economic and environmental determinants of health.⁶⁻¹⁶

Health promotion is defined as ‘the process of enabling people to increase control over their health and its determinants, and thereby improve their health’, and Te Pae Mahutonga health promotion framework provides a uniquely New Zealand approach to health promotion (see figure 1 below).^{13,17-19} NZCPHM policy statements align with Te Pae Mahutonga’s components of mauriora (cultural identity), waiora (physical environment), toiora (healthy lifestyles), te oranga (participation in society), ngā manukura (community leadership), te mana whakahaere (autonomy).

¹ Societal determinants of health include commercial, political, governance, economic, cultural and even religious determinants. Together these societal structures help create the conditions for health and disease. Each of them eventually impacts on a person’s health in a positive or negative way.



Figure 1: Te Pae Mahutonga health promotion framework¹⁶

Human health and wellbeing are linked inextricably to the health promoting characteristics and inter-dependencies of the family, work, educational, environmental and planetary ‘settings’ the community finds itself in; this is depicted conceptually in Barton and Grant’s Health Map and Raworth’s Doughnut of social and ecological/planetary boundaries (figures 2 and 3 below).^{20,21} The NZCPHM’s policies recognise that individual health and wellbeing are not created in a vacuum; instead, individuals are born with a specific genome that has been shaped by the various environments of their forebears. Individuals grow and make choices in cultures and environments that support or impair their ability to live healthy flourishing lives, within wider planetary ecological limits.



Figure 2: Barton and Grant’s Health Map¹⁹

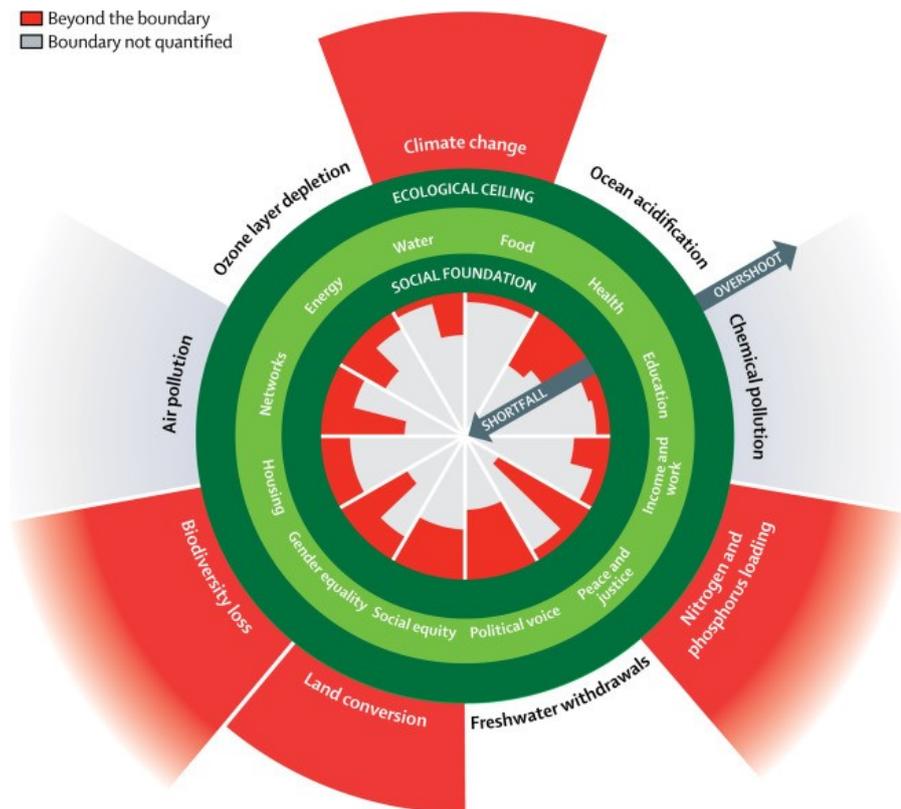


Figure 3: Raworth's Doughnut (social and ecological/planetary boundaries)²⁰

The NZCPHM recognises the importance of public policy, publicly funded programmes and regulation at the local and central government levels in enabling people and communities to 'make the healthy choice the easy choice'. Various interventions are necessary to achieve the fundamental human right of 'the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health ... without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition', living lives of dignity and opportunity whilst safeguarding the planet.^{20,21}

As a leader in public health and medicine in New Zealand, the NZCPHM therefore positions and advocates on important issues of public health that impact on the health and well-being of New Zealanders. The NZCPHM does this through developing its policy statements, which provide the evidence-base for policy positions and inform the NZCPHM's public policy submissions and media activity.

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