



Academic Health Institutions' Declaration on Planetary Health

Academic health institutions declare the health of the planet a Code Red emergency and call for immediate implementation of planetary health education and research, and the transition to climate-resilient and low-carbon health systems in order to build a healthy, sustainable, and just future for all.

This Declaration endorses the definition of planetary health as defined by the Planetary Health Alliance: *Planetary health is a solutions-oriented, transdisciplinary field and social movement focused on analyzing and addressing the impacts of human disruptions to Earth's natural systems on human health and all life on Earth.*¹



BACKGROUND

- Healthcare professionals have the responsibility to care for human health and to “do no harm.”
- Climate change is recognized as the greatest threat to health in the twenty-first century. The Working Group II contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report declared that the rate of global warming is a code red for humanity.² The 2021 *Lancet* Countdown on Health and Climate Change Report, which tracks the relationship between health and climate change, has similarly declared a Code Red for health, concluding that humankind must act immediately.³ Tackling climate change is thus the greatest opportunity to act for human health and global equity.⁴
- Considerable evidence indicates that climate change; contamination of air, water, and soil; ecosystem degradation; and biodiversity loss are already causing human morbidity and mortality in complex and interdependent ways, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations including people living in poverty, racialized people, Indigenous Peoples, elderly, children, and women around the world. These effects are predicted to radically increase over the next century.⁵
- Extreme weather events such as floods, wildfires, heatwaves, and storms disrupt health systems and prevent healthcare delivery, and are increasing in frequency and intensity as a result of the changing climate.⁶
- Calls for urgent action to preserve planetary health and keep global warming below 1.5 °C have been endorsed by leaders and institutions in clinical and academic healthcare training worldwide.⁷
- Global health system activities contribute 4.4-5% of global greenhouse emissions.^{8,9,10}
- Academic health institutions have a distinct responsibility to educate, train, and prepare health professionals to respond to and advocate for the health needs of society, from the individual to the populational level and from a local to a global level.¹¹
- Planetary health can only be achieved while also empowering women and girls through access to education, sexual and reproductive health services,¹² decision-making that centers health, the environment, and families,^{13,14,15} and leadership opportunities.

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- The [Healthy Climate Prescription](#), an initiative of the Global Climate and Health Alliance and the World Health Organization (WHO), is signed by over 600 organizations representing over 46 million health workers, together with over 3400 individuals from 102 countries, calls for:
 - All nations to update their national climate commitments under the Paris Agreement to commit to their fair share of limiting warming to 1.5°C
 - All nations to deliver a rapid and just transition away from fossil fuels, starting with immediately cutting all related permits, subsidies, and financing for fossil fuels, and to completely shift current financing into the development of clean energy
 - High income countries to make larger cuts to greenhouse gas emissions, in line with a 1.5°C temperature goal
 - High income countries to also provide the promised transfer of funds to low-income countries to help achieve the necessary mitigation and adaptation measures
 - Governments to build climate-resilient, low-carbon, sustainable health systems
 - Governments to also ensure that pandemic recovery investments support climate action and reduce social and health inequities
- Since the 2021 United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Scotland, 60 countries signed onto an international pledge to cut carbon from their health systems, and 20 of those countries have made a commitment to reach net-zero carbon emissions from their health systems by 2050 or sooner.¹⁶ The WHO, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), and the UNFCCC Climate Champions continue to formally engage countries and stakeholders on climate and health more broadly.
- In September 2022, the WHO and nearly 200 other health organizations endorsed a call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to lay out a legally binding global plan to phase out the use of fossil fuels.^{17,18}

ACTION PLAN

As socially and ecologically accountable institutions, WE COMMIT to implement the following plan.

Throughout, we will incorporate equity and justice into planetary health education and research by actively addressing environmental, social, and structural determinants of health. We will focus adaptation and resilience education and research on communities that are most affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

Recognizing that interconnection within nature is a fundamental part of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, we will incorporate Indigenous Traditional Knowledges and ways of knowing into adaptation and mitigation efforts, including stewardship of the planet's finite natural resources, led, and informed by Indigenous Peoples.¹⁹

We will position this work within existing quality improvement frameworks,²⁰ and ensure a community-based approach that reduces the need for acute care by optimizing the social, ecological, and structural determinants of health, investing in public health and primary care, and investing in health system climate resilience.



Academic Health Institutions will:

- Provide opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to take the [Planetary Health Pledge](#), incorporating work for a healthy planet into our duty of care.²¹
- Immediately work to align our healthcare schools with the [Planetary Health Education Framework](#), providing common foundational principles, competencies, and language to prepare future healthcare professionals to both mitigate further environmental degradation and to lead and contribute to adaptation and resilience strategies.²²
- Provide healthcare professionals and learners with value- and evidence-based training to reduce overdiagnosis and unnecessary investigations and treatment, to both improve the quality of care and reduce unnecessary healthcare-related environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions.²³
- Ensure that fiscal resources are allocated to planetary health research, including mitigation, adaptation, co-benefits, and resilience.
- Ensure that research, policy, and advocacy on planetary health is formally recognized in the academic health institution, for example in the academic promotion process, the appointment of dedicated planetary health leadership positions, and the granting of awards.
- Recognize that optimising human health is one of the most persuasive motivators for change and collaborate with other disciplines such as engineering, agriculture, architecture, urban planning, communications, behavioural sciences, and art to de-silo efforts and lead planetary health research, policy, and advocacy aimed at real-world implementation of solutions.
- Reduce emissions associated with travel by transitioning to virtual meetings when possible, including for student interviews, resident interviews, and conferences, choosing lower-emissions modes of travel (train, and bus rather than air travel) and offsetting travel-related greenhouse gas emissions.²⁴
- Divest from fossil fuels and other extractive industries and instead invest in a sustainable and healthy future for all.²⁵
- Endorse the [Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty](#), which calls for a global phase out of oil, gas, and coal and a complete transition to renewable energies.

Academic Health Institutions will advocate for:

- Healthcare institutions to commit to climate-resilient, net zero emissions healthcare by 2040 for the emissions controlled directly by healthcare, with an ambition to reach an 80% reduction by 2028-2032. For the emissions healthcare can influence, including travel to institutions and supply chain, reach net zero by 2045, with an ambition to reach an 80% reduction by 2036-2039.
- Healthcare institutions to become anchor institutions of sustainability for communities through integration into active transport networks, local agriculture programs, zero-carbon energy production, and circular economy practices emphasizing the responsible disposal of products and equipment, the recovery of valuable materials, and use of reusable supplies²⁶.
- Healthcare institutions to divest from fossil fuels and other extractive industries and reinvest in a sustainable and healthy future for all.²⁷
- Healthcare institutions to endorse the [Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty](#), which calls for a global phase out of oil, gas, and coal and a complete transition to renewable energies.
- Research granting agencies to invest in planetary health research.



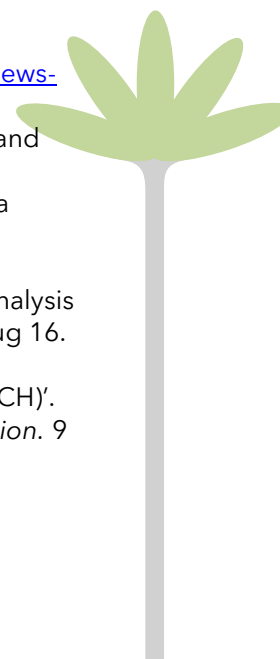


CONTEXT

This Declaration originates from the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada's (AFMC) International Declaration on Planetary Health Development Committee, which comprises international leaders in planetary health and academic medicine. The Committee recognizes that Faculties of Medicine have a social and environmental accountability²⁸ mandate to educate future and practicing health professionals and conduct research that will improve the health of the populations they serve. To this end, we call on all academic health institutions to take immediate action to both halt the negative impact of their activities on the planet's natural systems, and to institute adaptive and regenerative measures, including through advocacy.

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Academic Health Institutions' Declaration on Planetary Health

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