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IUHPE Position Statement

Planetary Health Promotion and Indigenous World Views and Knowledges

August 2023

"The state of the planet is broken. Humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal.

Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century. It must be the top, top priority for everyone, everywhere."

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General,

at Columbia University's World Leaders Forum, December 2nd 2020 (1)

"Protect and preserve the source of human health: Nature".

Prescription 1, WHO Manifesto for a Healthy Recovery from Covid-19 (2)

"A healthy planet is essential to the health and well-being of current and future generations and for enabling all to flourish. Well-being societies . . . [are] "committed to achieving equitable health now and for future generations without breaching ecological limits."

The Geneva Charter for Well-being, December 2021 (3)

"Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their [...] lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard."

Article 25 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (4)

"...Indigenous knowledge, distilled over millennia of close and direct contact with nature, can help to point the way. . . it is time to heed their voices, reward their knowledge and respect their rights."

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, 2020 (1)

"We cannot have good health without a clear, healthy, and strong environment...We should endorse Indigenous human rights. We should enable whanau and families to flourish. We should support community initiatives. We should keep our skies clean and fresh. We should protect our lands. We should safeguard our rivers and oceans. We should preserve our native forests. We should restore Nature's balance."

Sir Mason Durie

IUHPE 2019 World Conference on Health Promotion, Rotorua, New Zealand (5)

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IUHPE Position Statement on Planetary Health Promotion and Indigenous World Views and Knowledges[1]

"Participants call on the global community to urgently act to promote planetary health and sustainable development for all, now and for the sake of future generations",

WAIORA: Promoting Planetary Health and Sustainable Development for All (IUHPE Rotorua Statement) (6)

"We call on the health promotion community and the wider global community to make space for and privilege Indigenous peoples' voices and Indigenous knowledges in taking action with us to promote the health of Mother Earth and sustainable development for the benefit of all."

WAIORA – Indigenous Peoples' Statement for Planetary Health and Sustainable Development, IUHPE (7)

Context and background

IUHPE's 2021 – 2026 Strategic Plan (8) identifies three priorities. The first is to take action on the determinants of health, which include planetary health and the sustainable development goals. Thus, the intent of this current Position Statement is to:

1) Present the evidence on the growing threats to human wellbeing posed by human-induced damage to global ecological systems.
2) Discuss the imperative of Indigenous world and knowledges in understanding and addressing the global challenges we face as a human society.
3) Explore the implications of points 1 and 2 above for health promotion and education.
4) Propose a set of priority actions for planetary health promotion and education, from the global to the local levels.

[1] Readers should refer to the accompanying Background Paper for a more detailed discussion of the issues discussed in this Position Statement.

Our understanding of the determinants of population health, and of the role of health promotion and education, began to change with the publication of two reports in 2015. Both were rooted in -- and driven by -- the findings of Earth system science that the Earth "behaves as a single, self-regulating system comprised of physical, chemical, biological and human components" (9, emphasis added).

The first report was developed by a working group of the Canadian Public Health Association (10) and sought to bring the ecological determinants of health into the discussion on population health and wellbeing. It argued for an eco-social approach to health promotion that recognizes the ecological and the social are completely intertwined. The second report was by the Rockefeller-Lancet Commission on Planetary Health, which defined planetary health as "the health of human civilisation and the state of the natural systems on which it depends" (11). This report also argued for an eco-social framing and approach to population health and wellbeing.

These concepts were recently an important focus of the WHO's 10th Global Health Promotion Conference and the Geneva Charter for Well-being (3) that resulted from the conference. Sustainable well-being societies, the Charter notes, are "committed to achieving equitable health now and for future generations without breaching ecological limits", making the Charter a clear call for an eco-social approach to health.

The global eco-social challenge: Welcome to the Anthropocene

The power with which humanity now disrupts and harms the Earth's natural systems is so immense that scholars claim we have entered a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene (12). It is so named not because it is the age of and for humans – anthropos being the ancient Greek word for human. Rather, it is because humans have created a new geological epoch. In other words, we have become a disruptive force at a planetary scale. So, the Anthropocene is not about us, it is because of us.

It should be obvious that we cannot continue to exceed the carrying capacity of the Earth without impacting its natural resources. At some point, our home planet will become exhausted and its natural systems will collapse, posing an enormous threat

to human health. Yet, we continue to live by over-extracting the Earth's resources, especially in high-income countries, which collectively use the equivalent of 3.8 Earth's worth of resources and bio-capacity each year (13).

The result is a form of eco-social injustice, with profound health impacts on human and ecosystem wellbeing. High income communities in high-income countries generally live well and in good health (even as economic, social and health inequities and disparities exist simultaneously in these countries), while using far more than their fair share of the Earth's limited resources. Meanwhile, the health of low-income countries and populations is jeopardized because they get far less than their fair share of natural resources and the wealth that results, while often getting more than their fair share of pollution and ecological harm.

It cannot be ignored that the low-income countries of today's world have been exploited for their natural resources and labor for centuries. The current world order must be contextualized through our historic understanding of the rise of imperialism, colonization, enslavement and oppression. Resource, wealth and health disparities today are situated in this historic context.

Moreover, high-income countries and people continue to deprive future generations of their fair share, thus violating the fundamental principle of sustainable development, which is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (14).

The implications for societies and the global population of these human-driven ecological changes were summed up succinctly by the UN Secretary General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, in his foreword to the 2021 UNEP report 'Making Peace with Nature' (15):

> "Humanity is waging war on nature. This is senseless and suicidal. The consequences of our recklessness are already apparent in human suffering, towering economic losses and the accelerating erosion of life on Earth."

The same UNEP report identified and addressed the "triple planetary crisis" of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. In addressing the Stockholm + 50

conference in June 2022, Mr. Guterres noted the health implications of this triple crisis (16):

> "the climate emergency – "that is killing and displacing ever more people each year" – biodiversity loss – which threatens "more than three billion people" – and pollution and waste, "that is costing some nine million lives a year".

The health and health equity implications of this situation should be self-evident, and provide all the justification needed to make planetary health a priority focus for health promotion.

Indigenous peoples' voices and knowledges in planetary health

Much of the ecological devastation caused by unsustainable economic development across the world is founded on the erroneous human construct that humans are separate from the environment, which is seen as an unlimited resource to be exploited. This is the opposite of the Indigenous framework that there is an inseparable interaction and contiguity between humanity and the natural environment (17, 18); the part cannot undermine the whole upon which it depends, and of which it is a part.

The global challenges we face have raised greater awareness across the world of this inherent interdependence of all forms of life, and the planet as one system. But this reality is not new to the 476 million Indigenous peoples of the world (19). In fact, viewing humanity as deeply connected with the environment is a central element of Indigenous knowledge systems. This interdependence is not a romanticized version of the environment, but one that is perceived through a worldview that our health is tied to the health of the planet. We cannot separate human and ecosystem wellbeing in this interconnected paradigm.

After centuries of colonisation and oppression, Indigenous Peoples and their knowledges are increasingly recognized as critical contributors to the future of

humanity and the global challenges it is now facing: "heed their voices, reward their knowledge and respect their rights", said Mr. Guterres in 2020 (1).

In the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (4), the reclamation, restoration and celebration of Indigenous culture, identity and belonging is essential. These principles must underpin the future of health promotion and education.

The place of spirituality in planetary health

Spirituality is another facet of human life that offers pathways to re-engage with humanity's deep connection with the natural world (20), and to foster environmental awareness, activism and wellbeing in ways that can enhance both health promotion and planetary health.

Spirituality also relates to Indigenous perspectives, where spirituality is central to holistic wellbeing (7). Yet, seldom in mainstream health promotion and planetary health action do we work with the spiritualities of Indigenous and other peoples and their institutions.

Proactively highlighting eco-spiritual approaches has the potential to affect fundamental values and behaviour. We need to make spiritualities explicit and ecologically responsible in the new planetary health promotion framework.

It bears noting that the spirituality we are highlighting is not a return to a dogmatic form of ideology in any organized religious institution. It is a fundamental understanding of the spiritual aspect of human life that exist in all communities, regardless of religious affiliation.

Implications for health promotion

What then should health promotion do in the face of these existential threats to the health of humanity? And what should IUHPE do?

- First, we need to recognize, document and promote the health co-benefits of more sustainable societies and communities with the recognition that the planet's health and human health are deeply interconnected.
- Second, we can take inspiration from the Geneva Charter, the product of the 10th Global Health Promotion Conference, which was held in December 2021. The Charter "expresses the urgency of creating sustainable well-being societies, committed to achieving equitable health now and for future generations without breaching ecological limits".
- Third, as was highlighted at the IUHPE Rotorua conference in 2019, and as has been emphasized in this Position Statement, we can learn from the values, knowledges and spiritual frameworks of the world's Indigenous people and incorporate them in health promotion practice and education.
- Fourth, we must work with the world's health promotion and education professionals and others to make an eco-social approach to wellbeing a core competency for health promotion and disease prevention.
- Fifth, health promoters must work to ensure equitable human well-being and the planet's health are at the centre of all decision–making and governance processes. Among other things, this requires the creation of a well-being economy supported by well-being budgets and the development of healthy public policy for the common good.

<u>Action agenda</u>

The IUHPE Action Agenda for Planetary Health Promotion and Indigenous Knowledge includes:

- IUHPE's own commitments to action
- IUHPE's recommendations for action to:
    - Health promotion practitioners
    - Health promotion educators and researchers

- National governments
- WHO and other UN organisations

IUHPE's own commitments to action:

1. IUHPE recognises that health is eco-social in nature and that the health of humanity depends upon ensuring an adequate social foundation for everyone while living within the ecological limits of the Earth.

2. IUHPE commits to enhancing a planetary consciousness in health promotion and incorporating an eco-social understanding of human wellbeing into health promotion, making it transformative and more effective.

3. IUHPE commits to:

- incorporating into the IUHPE competencies and standards an eco-social approach to health and human wellbeing, including Indigenous values, knowledges, teachings, a reverence for nature and a recognition of the place of spirituality in planetary health.
- ensuring that planetary health is an integral part of IUHPE policies, initiatives, and resources, such as its regional and world conferences, and incorporating therein Indigenous values, knowledges, teachings, a reverence for nature and a recognition of the place of spirituality in planetary health.
- establishing a pool of educational resources on planetary health for the teaching of health promotion across the world, incorporating therein Indigenous values, knowledges, teachings, a reverence for nature and a recognition of the place of spirituality in planetary health.
- supporting the development of local and national hubs of a movement for planetary health, incorporating therein Indigenous values, knowledges, teachings, a reverence for nature and a recognition of the place of spirituality in planetary health.

4. IUHPE will advocate for the creation of a UN Global Commission on Planetary Health and for the adoption by governments of the Well-being society concept and approach.
5. IUHPE will explore the need for an IUHPE GWG on Health Promotion and Spirituality.

IUHPE's recommendations for action to:

1) Health promotion practitioners

- Learn about the ecological determinants of health and planetary health, the concept of a Well-being society and Indigenous values, knowledges and teachings.
- Incorporate these concepts and ideas into your practice.
- Advocate for the incorporation of these concepts, values, and principles in public policy and across sectors, at all levels.

2) Health promotion educators and researchers

- Incorporate into the core curriculum learning about the ecological determinants of health and planetary health, the concept of a Well-being society and Indigenous values, knowledges and teachings.
- Undertake research into these same three areas.

3) National governments and international organisations

- Place human wellbeing and planetary health at the centre of all decisions, measure progress in terms of sustainable human and social development and engage with and learn from Indigenous people in this process.
- Create a Well-being budget in which a social foundation is met for all, within the ecological constraints of planetary boundaries.
- Develop healthy public policy for the common good at all levels.
- Prioritise, fund and support research into the safeguarding of planetary health and the creation of a well-being society.

- Engage the public in the process of understanding and addressing the ecological, social, economic and cultural challenges of the 21st century

4) WHO and other UN organisations

Recognising the strong leadership of the UN Secretary General on 'making peace with nature', the WHO's strong leadership on climate change and health and the UNDRIP and various UN organisations that have emphasized the value and importance of Indigenous worldviews and knowledges, IUHPE recommends:

- WHO should extend its leadership on climate change and health to issues of planetary health
- In particular, the UN or WHO should establish a Global Commission on Planetary Health
- The various UN organisations that have emphasized the value and importance of Indigenous worldviews and knowledges and partnership with Indigenous people must continue to do so.
- The UN Secretary General ensure that planetary health and 'making peace with nature' are central to the continued work of the UN.
- In particular, the UN Secretary General should ensure that planetary health and 'making peace with nature' are central to the planned Summit of the Future in 2024.

More detailed information on these commitments and recommendations are spelled out in the accompanying background paper.

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