

A call for clinicians to act on planetary health



We are rapidly changing the world around us. A growing and urbanising human population with expanding patterns of production and consumption is driving rapid global environmental change, manifested in large-scale biodiversity loss, climate change, deforestation and land degradation, resource scarcity, changing biogeochemical flows, and pollution.¹ While the second half of the 20th century has seen major global health gains, the future of global health is increasingly under threat, with a growing non-communicable disease burden, expanding nutritional vulnerability, new infectious disease exposures, and susceptibility to displacement, injury, and mental health risks, all of which disproportionately threaten the poor, the young, the elderly, and future generations.² This is the focus of planetary health, which characterises the connections between human-caused disruptions of Earth's natural systems and the resulting impacts on human health and makes the case for globally concerted action.³

The newly launched Clinicians for Planetary Health⁴ initiative posits that, through communicating the urgency of planetary health challenges via a global clinical network, we can spur individual-level behaviour change and bottom-up environmental action. We seek to mobilise clinicians and clinicians' groups around the world, recognising their importance in protecting our health, their authority as trusted sources of information spanning political and cultural divides, and their reach across geographical contexts, languages, and practice settings. With a broad coalition of partners committed to planetary health, we plan to develop and disseminate patient-focused materials that describe the health threats of accelerating global environmental change. We seek to educate patients that certain behaviour and lifestyle modifications can simultaneously improve their own health and help to secure the health of the world's least-resourced people and future generations by protecting our planet's natural systems. Recognising the importance of wider systemic change, we also hope to encourage planetary health activism at local, national, and international scales.

This Earth Day, we call for clinicians worldwide to join us. Addressing planetary health challenges fundamentally rests on collective action. Together, we must consider our dietary choices, modes of transport, energy sources, norms of production and consumption, political actions,

avenues of community engagement, and models of environmental stewardship. Physicians, physician assistants, nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives, dietitians, counsellors, traditional healers, and other clinicians can make a difference by encouraging action at the individual and community levels focused on lifestyle modifications and forward-thinking policy, innovation, and adaptation measures. Join us in safeguarding our health and that of future generations by advancing outreach efforts, collaborating and sharing best practices with an international coalition of clinicians, co-generating patient-focused resources in multiple languages, and engaging in other channels of planetary health activism. To get involved, visit the Clinicians for Planetary Health page on the Planetary Health Alliance website.

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We declare no competing interests. This global call to action is supported by the Planetary Health Alliance, the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA), Health Care Without Harm, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations, the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, the American Public Health Association, the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the Caribbean College of Family Physicians, the Brazilian Society of Family and Community Medicine, the Brazilian College of Lifestyle Medicine (CBMEV), the Brazilian Ministry of Health Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), the Uruguayan Society of Family and Community Medicine (SUMEFAC), the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, Irish Doctors for the Environment, the Association of Public Health Registrars of Ireland, the Brookfield Centre for Lifestyle Medicine of Nigeria, the Society of Lifestyle Medicine of Nigeria, the African Lifestyle Medicine Association, the Philippine Academy of Family Physicians, Doctors for the Environment Australia, the Public Health Association of Australia, Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate, the University of Minnesota School of Nursing & MHealth/Fairview Nursing Collaboratory, Climate for Health, Health In Harmony, the True Health Initiative, and the Consortium of Universities for Global Health.

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- 2 Myers S. Planetary health: protecting human health on a rapidly changing planet. *Lancet* 2017; **390**: 2860–68.
- 3 Whitmee S, Haines A, Beyrer C, et al. Safeguarding human health in the Anthropocene epoch: report of The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health. *Lancet* 2015; **386**: 1973–2028.
- 4 Planetary Health Alliance, Clinicians for Planetary Health Working Group, WONCA Working Party on the Environment. Declaration calling for clinicians of the world to act on planetary health. March 1, 2019. <https://files.visura.co/users/12837/9c0af30afdb8667feb2542f973bb47e6.pdf> (accessed April 1, 2019).



Published Online
April 19, 2019
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30846-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30846-3)

For more on the Clinicians for Planetary Health initiative see www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/clinicians

See Online for appendix