



EFN Policy Statement on Nursing Planetary Health

Policies to tackle global environmental changes have gained an important momentum in the design of COVID-19 recovery policies and the Green Deal in the EU. Planetary health provides a relevant framework to understand and tackle the interconnection of causes and consequences between health and these changes. (1) Nurses have a key role to play in the co-design and implementation of planetary health solutions. Health promotion and prevention is key in nursing and nursing education. The European Union decision-makers should therefore facilitate the contribution of nurses and facilitate and support the education of nurses in the mitigation of and adaptation to local and global environmental changes in addition to existing health promotion. The prevention and communication of nurses about hazards and healthy solutions to the population will be key.

The ecological disruption caused by the unsustainable socio-economic systems can threaten the foundation of the health systems and withdraw decades of human progress. This is what the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have shown to the EU, Europe and the world.

According to the first report of The Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Commission on planetary health, this planetary health *'is the achievement of the highest attainable standard of health, wellbeing, and equity worldwide through judicious attention to the human systems-political, economic, and social-that shape the future of humanity and the Earth's natural systems that define the safe environmental limits within which humanity can flourish. Put simply, planetary health is the health of human civilisation and the state of the natural systems on which it depends'*. (2) Planetary health proposes many solutions to address the underlying and ecological drivers (e.g. consumption patterns and biodiversity loss), proximate causes (e.g. air quality and infectious disease exposure), mediating factors (e.g. behaviour and governance) of the effects of anthropogenic change on human health such as infectious disease and mental health issues.(3)

It is therefore very important and relevant that the European Union integrates a planetary health lens in its policymaking and considers the high contribution nurses could bring in its implementation.

Nurses are the most trusted professionals, and they are in a privileged position to communicate with citizens on lifestyle change and prevention. Based on a long tradition of informing the public about diseases and promoting health, it is evident that nurses take on an important role as change agents in a variety of activities concerning the health aspects of local and global environmental changes.

The EFN proposes to define the role and contribution as “nursing planetary health” and describe the priority areas of actions and prerequisite conditions for their effective implementation. Nursing planetary health implies addressing the consequences of manmade planetary change on food and nutrition, infectious disease risk and management, the burden of non-communicable diseases, migration and conflicts, mental and physical health. Most of these issues are trans-sectoral and tackling them require transdisciplinary research and actions with relevant scientists and professionals.

Nurses can help to communicate about the need to have adequate regulation and actions based on the concept of health-environment co-benefits – actions which have many cascading and beneficial effects for health and ecosystems. The key knowledge and nursing action domains include (a) nature-based solutions, (b) “green prescribing”, (c) the prevention of air pollution problems (which accounts for 500,000 premature deaths in Europe and an annual social cost of € 166 billion(4)), (d) the promotion of healthy and environmentally sustainable (plant-based) diet, (e) the reducing and improved management of waste, (f) the promotion of healthy physical activity and low-emission mobility, (g) the deep and complex thinking on how to promote lifestyle that are ‘good for the people and good for the planet’, (h) all relevant adaptation and preparedness actions to increase the resilience to future health crisis and (i) nursing care for psychological responses to the threats of environmental changes.

To contribute to nursing planetary health effectively, it is necessary to advance the role of nurses. At the policy level, nurses can showcase their frontline experience and use their voice to advocate for ambitious planetary health actions from the local level to the higher levels of political action. In planetary health policy and economic actions, nurses can orient “products, services and solutions that embed planetary health ideas and principles” and contribute to the monitoring of indicators of planetary health and wellbeing to measure human progress. At the health promotion prevention level, nurses can be the primary source of information for their patients and communities about the effects of

environmental change on health and use their agency to promote planetary health lifestyles that are good for people's health and for the planet. At the healthcare level, nurses can participate to the ecological transformation of their workplaces to contribute to reduce greenhouse gases emissions and the diverse pollutants generated through healthcare, and to adapt the infrastructure and procedures for a better preparedness to future threats. Finally, at the individual and patient level, nurses can implement nature-based solutions, participate to the planetary health education of their patients, adapt their practice to lower the footprint of nursing care and be better prepared to deal with the effects of global environmental change in patient management.

To realise this vision and make nursing planetary health happens, the European Union needs highly educated and well-paid nurses, excellent working conditions in the healthcare sector, nurses encouraged and empowered to engage with their communities and decision-makers.

As such, the EFN members call on the European Commission, the European Parliament, and National Governments (Council of the European Union) to:

1. Facilitate and co-create concrete nursing planetary health actions, led by nurses in advanced roles.
2. Implement the nursing planetary health approach to protect the health of humans and the ecosystems on which it depends in all policies, primarily those related to the European Green Deal¹ and with an emphasis on equity as a guiding principle.
3. Promote multilateral and inclusive governance by including nurses in decision-making. This could be done by implementing a trans-sectoral planetary health policy framework.
4. Finance research and actions to ensure the participation of nurses in decision-making and implementation.
5. Invest resources in advanced roles in Nursing Planetary Health for improved prevention and planetary health promotion.

Further Readings

Resources quoted in the text:

1. Buse CG, Oestreicher JS, Ellis NR, Patrick R, Brisbois B, Jenkins AP, et al. Public health guide to field developments linking ecosystems , environments and health in the Anthropocene. 2018;420-5.

¹ Overview of European Green Deal initiatives https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/default/files/eu-climate-action/docs/green_deal_birthday_tree_en.pdf

2. Whitmee S, Haines A, Beyrer C, Boltz F, Capon AG, Ferreira B, et al. Safeguarding human health in the Anthropocene epoch: report of The Rockefeller Foundation – Lancet Commission on. Lancet [Internet]. 2015;386:1973–2028. Available from: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)60901-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60901-1)
3. Myers S, Frumkin H. Planetary Health – Protecting Nature to Protect Ourselves [Internet]. 1st ed. Myers S, Frumkin H, editors. Washington DC: Island Press; 2020. 536 p. Available from: <https://islandpress.org/books/planetary-health>
4. De Bruyn S, De Vries J. Health costs of air pollution in European cities and the linkage with transport [Internet]. Delft; Available from: <https://cleanair4health.eu/>
5. Guzmán CAF, Aguirre AA, Astle B, Barros E, Bayles B, Chimbari M, et al. A framework to guide planetary health education. Lancet Planet Heal [Internet]. 2021;5196(21):19–21. Available from: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00110-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00110-8/fulltext)

Other resources include:

- A European Green Deal – Striving to be the first climate-neutral continent
https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en
- EU climate action and the European Green Deal
https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action_en
- EU climate action policy: Responding to the global emergency
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_S_TU\(2021\)689378](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_S_TU(2021)689378)
- European Commission. An international treaty on pandemic prevention and preparedness
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/pandemic-treaty/>
- Protecting health in an environment challenged by climate change: European Regional Framework for Action
<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/Climate-change/publications/2010/protecting-health-in-an-environment-challenged-by-climate-change-european-regional-framework-for-action>

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