



CLIMATE ACTION NURSES POSITION STATEMENT ON PLANETARY HEALTH.

Climate Action Nurses is a national network of nurses aiming to empowering, educating and activating the nursing profession to take action on Climate Change. It is Climate Action Nurses' mission to integrate Planetary health into the core philosophy and practice of the nursing profession

Climate Action Nurses believes

- Human health is entirely dependent on flourishing natural environments.¹
- Past and existing generations have mortgaged the human health of future generations in order to reach maximum economic productivity.
- Climate change, loss of biodiversity, toxic accumulation of chemicals, interruptions to clean water supply and soil degradation, collectively threaten global health outcomes like never before. Conversely, conservation of natural resources can benefit human health.
- The environmental and health impacts of the Anthropocene will disproportionately burden vulnerable individuals and nations.²
- In order to alter our current trajectory, as a society, we must shift our definition of human prosperity.
- Environmental stewardship has always been in the nurses' remit. The links between the environment and human health are recognised consistently across the history of the Nursing profession.³

Climate Action Nurses acknowledges

- The imperative role of integrating Indigenous wisdom, spiritual traditions, and First Nations' knowledge into our societal response to threats on planetary health, fostering a holistic and collaborative approach towards a sustainable and prosperous future.
- The critical role of nurses as advocates, educators, and leaders in driving climate action and promoting sustainable practices within healthcare systems and communities.

Climate Action Nurses seeks to encourage

- Planetary health must be embedded across all nursing philosophy and curriculum in line with the Planetary Health Education Framework.⁴
- Governments and healthcare systems should rapidly implement policies in line with the Planetary Boundaries Framework.⁵

Climate Action Nurses maintains the position that:

- All nurses have the ability to influence policy, shape societal values, and achieve better patient outcomes through their direct action on planetary health.
- Exceptional governance and stewardship are fundamental in preventing civilisation collapse.⁶
- Reticence for collaboration across jurisdictions due to conflict and competition has hindered progress.⁶ All nursing organisations must collaborate to achieve the best outcomes for humanity and, by extension, our patients.
- The most impactful way that nurses can be instrumental, is by taking measures across four key areas: Policy, Advocacy, Education and Research.



Climate Action Nurses believe that environmental stewardship has always been within our remit. We believe that environmental stewardship falls under the philosophy of Planetary Health, which acknowledges the fundamental interdependence between human health and the natural systems in which our species exists. Planetary Health globally encompasses the entirety of human and ecosystem health, as well as threats to them. As such, climate change falls under the umbrella term of Planetary Health, alongside other major threats to human health, such as the consistent depletion of natural resources, and pollution of the environment. Climate Action Nurses emphatically declare that climate change is an imminent and urgent crisis demanding immediate action. We firmly believe that integrating Planetary Health into the paradigm of EVERY nurse is an important aspect of climate action, equipping present and future nurses to confront the profound personal and professional challenges posed by nursing in the Anthropocene.⁷

Currently, both human and planetary health are threatened by climate change in an unprecedented manner, and as the planet's health worsens, so do the threats to human health. The rapid increase in atmospheric greenhouse gases, alongside depletion and pollution of the environment, collectively causes a changing climate, environmental toxin accumulation, and ecosystem collapse.⁶ The pathways to impacting human health are complex and multifaceted. However, rising global temperatures, increased frequency and severity of extreme weather, poor air quality, food and water insecurity, changing virus and disease vectors will all continue to have strong adverse impacts on human health. All of these impacts will result in increased mortality and morbidity, for future and current generations. This will include increases in heat strokes/exhaustion, community displacement, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, inadequate nutrition, changing virus and disease distribution, and poor mental health leading to self-harm.⁸ Due to these cumulative threats to health, all healthcare practitioners, inclusive of nurses, must play an essential role in environmental stewardship.

Climate change is also already impacting Australia, through extreme temperatures⁹ and unprecedented floods.¹⁰ The Black Summer fires of 2019/2020 were “unprecedented, in scale, intensity, and impact”, both within the Australian and the global context.¹¹ These fires directly killed 33 people, indirectly killed 450 people through smoke inhalation, an estimated 1 billion animals, burnt 23% of Australia's temperate forests,¹¹ and subsequently created an unprecedented burden of ill health due to poor air quality. The New South Wales (NSW) 2022 floods were likewise unprecedented in living memory. As a consequence, areas such as Lismore, have now become in some parts, unliveable, causing the government to start a buy-back scheme for the houses.¹²

Globally, heat wave days have already increased dramatically, leading to a 68% increase in heat-related deaths between the early 2000s and the 2020s 2000-2004 and 2017-2021.¹³ As a continent formed primarily by desert, Australia is characteristically hot and dry and is particularly susceptible to the impacts of heat. It is expected that deaths from heatwaves will increase under further climate change, as the planet warms. Given the compounding threat to human health, it is imperative that all nurses and healthcare providers are educated in and act upon planetary health principles.

Climate Action Nurses acknowledge the Lancet's position that past and existing generations have mortgaged the human health of future generations in order to reach our own economic productivity. We recognise that contemporary governance has led to societal inequities across both health and wealth.¹⁴ Capitalism, rapid industrialisation, neo-liberalism, settler-colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy and militancy have contributed to the degradation of the natural world.



Climate Action Nurses seeks to encourage action on climate change by embedding planetary health into nursing philosophy and, more tangibly, through nursing curriculum. Planetary health promotes the health of humanity by situating human health within human systems. At its core, destruction of environmental landscapes has been driven by human compulsion to industrialise human civilisations. The risks we face as a global society “lie within ourselves and the societies we have created”. In this, we formally recognise the Planetary Health Education Framework domains:

- Connection to Nature – this is the core of Planetary Health philosophy
- The Anthropocene and health - this era is having a profound impact on human and ecosystem health
- Systems thinking and Complexity – the intricate interdependencies within ecosystems and human health, guiding us towards holistic and regenerative solutions
- Equity and justice – all human populations and ecosystems are recognised, and respected. All have the right to have the opportunity to reach their full vitality
- Movement building and systems change – inspired action is dependent on transformative relationships. At the core of this domain is the need to foster mentorship and solidarity across individuals promoting planetary health.

It is therefore the position of Climate Action Nurses that:

1. Human health is dependent on flourishing natural environments.
2. The impacts of climate change and poor planetary health will disproportionately impact vulnerable populations.
3. Many of the solutions required to address health challenges associated with soil degradation, inaccessibility to clean water, accumulation of toxic chemicals and climate change are within reach. We must adjust the way that we define and promote societal productivity. Many interventions aimed at preserving the natural environment for future generations are also mutually beneficial to supporting optimal human health.
4. The healthcare sector must build knowledge, resilience and preparedness to climate related impacts into service provision and workforce.
5. Planetary health must be integrated into health budgets and forecasting.
6. Governments must invest in the rapid optimisation of primary health care and public health provisions.
7. Governments must urgently implement policies aligned with the Planetary Boundaries Framework and environmental stewardship. This is inclusive of policies that place restrictions on carbon emissions, as well as the use or procurement of natural resources.
8. Strategies that promote planetary health resilience and regeneration should be widely adopted by government, organisations and individuals. This includes the uptake of plant-based diets.
9. Investments in training and support of Indigenous populations in delivering primary health care, whilst also respecting and valuing traditional methods of health promotion and ecological management should be prioritised.
10. Behaviour change is best supported by encouraging conscious decision making when it comes to planetary health and environmental regeneration

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