

# OCEANIA PLANETARY HEALTH FORUM

Nadi, Fiji | 5th-6th November 2018

## STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS FOR NATURE & HUMAN HEALTH

### A Call to Action: Policy Dialogue on Planetary Health in the Oceania Region

#### Oceania Context

1. Subject matter experts, practitioners and researchers in health, development and environment, from the Oceania region and beyond, met in Nadi, Fiji from 5-6 November 2018 at the inaugural Oceania Planetary Health Forum.
2. **The forum acknowledged** that the concept 'planetary health' concerns the health of human civilisation and the state of the natural systems on which it depends. It is particularly relevant in understanding, and urgently responding to, health impacts resulting from environmental degradation and climate change. Planetary Health inspires a cultural and equitable transformation in how we feed, move, house, power and care for the world.
3. **The forum recognised:**
  - a. the unique ecosystems, rich natural resources and diverse economies and health standards of the region, comprising Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia and Australasia, spanning 100 million km<sup>2</sup>, home for about 40 million people, on some 10,000 large and small islands, with ten times more ocean than land mass, and
  - b. the extraordinary cultural diversity and globally significant number of languages in Oceania and an imperative to ensure the continuity of these diversities in perpetuity.
4. **The forum recalled** the Hippocratic Oath of 'First Do No Harm' and recognised that it is a code of conduct that can be applied not only to individual health but also to the broader Oceania public health and ecosystem management. Additionally it embraces the notion of 'Leaving No One Behind', espoused through the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their aspirations of ensuring that the future and existence of small island states of Oceania are addressed in a just and equitable manner.
5. **The forum recalled** that health ministers had foresight and wisdom in the creation of the Healthy Islands vision with its five focus areas addressing human and ecological health. Its relevance to sustainable existence and health of the Oceania region is embodied in the vision, not only for the current but also future generations.
6. **The forum recognised** the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Blue Pacific narrative as the core catalyst of collective action in Oceania.
7. **The forum noted** that the health and wellbeing of the people of Oceania, and of future generations, is currently threatened by a range of issues including population growth, urbanization, deforestation and land degradation, overfishing, nutrition transition, dietary shifts, waste and climate change. Significant and persistent health issues in Oceania include high rates of communicable diseases such as mosquito borne viruses, and water borne bacteria, including typhoid and leptospirosis. Together, protracted communicable disease outbreaks along with high rates of non-communicable diseases – create a high public health burden that can exhaust existing response and management systems. Despite investment over the Millennium Development Goal period (2000-2015), progress has stalled for water and sanitation in Oceania.
8. **The forum noted** a call by Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) that climate-related loss and damage are impinging on lives and livelihoods. These have cascading health, social and economic effects and need urgent attention. Decreasing recovery periods between extreme weather and environmental events including flooding and drought compound recovery. Together these particularly affect the marginalised, women, children, older persons and people with disabilities.
9. **The forum noted** the persistence of large scale, complex and uncertain issues at the nexus of environment and health, the emergence of new ones, and the escalation of most of them. Climate change, water and food safety and security, and ocean pollution are chief among them. Microplastics in the ocean was highlighted as a singular example: recent statistics showed that 80% of plastics are land-based in origin, and 40% of that comes from sources external to the Pacific. Nine million tonnes of plastic are produced daily, and it is estimated that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish (on current projections, also based on fishery declines) in the ocean. Microplastics have been traced throughout the oceanic trophic system, including in humans. This is a waste management, population, behaviour and attitude issue. It has also become a food security and health issue with the incorporation of microplastics into foods and may well be exacerbated by climatic extremes and natural disasters.



10. **The forum was aware** of the social and economic dimensions and challenges of anthropogenic environmental change- inequalities, overconsumption, commercialisation, economic rationalism – and the potential human responses or solutions – sustainability practices, collective resistance and collaboration, and political re-engagement. Change for the better would require a shift from gross domestic product as the measure of prosperity toward green growth ideals that more effectively assimilate economic development with quality of life, health and natural systems.
11. **The forum recognised** that in addressing these types of issues, there is an urgent need to adopt new mindsets and practical approaches that simultaneously safeguard human health and the natural systems that underpin it, one capable of bringing to the forefront inter- and intra-generational equity dimensions, the connectedness of people to their land and water, and calling for integrated approaches to respond to the social, environmental and economic impacts of increasing pressures on the region and its people.
12. **The forum supported this Planetary Health approach**, to unite and strengthen human, animal and environmental health, environmental management, natural resource management, and indigenous local knowledge.
13. **The forum examined** optimal governance arrangements to deal with persistent, emerging and escalating phenomena at the environment and health nexus; current governance arrangements were often seen to be inadequate, disconnected, fragmented, competitive or conspicuously absent. An illustration of the disconnect is the fact that ministries of health and environment meet in isolation of one another. While clear pathways and structures for policy and action are therefore limited, there is opportunity to progressively inform, unify and enhance existing relevant and related networks, initiatives and partnerships to improve commonality of purpose.
14. **The forum recognised** the case for policy development, investment and action where co-benefits between health and environment is most likely, noting that this is consistent with calls for co-ordinated and integrated approaches to deliver the SDGs. Moreover, **participants in the forum agreed** that the need for integrated approaches capable of delivering co-benefits and synergies is most needed in regions like Oceania precisely due to vulnerability to global-scale stressors (such as climate change) and its attendant injustices (i.e. noting that many of the peoples of Oceania have contributed the least to the problem but are among the most at risk from its consequences).
15. **The forum recognised** the value and diversity of people, land and sea relationships, and the relevance and opportunities presented by place-based approaches, particularly as they apply to Indigenous local knowledge and leadership. Given the diversity of Indigenous cultures, the forum was aware of the importance of having the authority to speak for those people and places. In Oceania the connections and relationships (people-land-water) are tangible and experienced through identity, sense of place, and spirituality. These relationships are in many cases intact, or exist in a state where reconnection is both plausible and desirable. Because of this there is a capacity for Oceania to provide global leadership in Indigenous approaches to environment and health.

16. **The forum recognised** in this both a challenge, and an opportunity, to facilitate the continuation of these traditional relationships and strongly participatory practices, and to gain insight into collective concerns by including the voice of the lived experience as evidence, using this voice (personal connection) to resonate with governments, international agencies and corporates to leverage change.
17. **The forum was equally aware** of the need to create opportunities to facilitate (and share) innovative new and existing solutions, to motivate change and to involve young people, as well as more senior members of societies. Moreover, the forum acknowledged the utmost importance of early life, not only for the foundations of future health, but for instilling the pro-environmental ideologies we depend on for our future.

## Actions for policy dialogue on Planetary Health

To deal with persistent, emergent and escalating challenges at the environment and health nexus in the Oceania region, the forum calls for a renewed action orientation for international, intergovernmental and national organisations to:

18. **encourage** existing networks to establish common platforms to facilitate productive dialogue and collaboration between the health and environment sectors and other relevant sectors;
19. **provide** the necessary resources to enable joint decision-making across sectors pertinent to health and environment, like those now being developed for emergency response and preparedness in the face of disease outbreaks and natural disasters, where all relevant government ministries along with appropriate thematic sectors and stakeholders are given a seat at the table and work cooperatively to overcome barriers to success;
20. **establish** the necessary legal and administrative arrangements to enable the health, environment and natural resource management sectors to work and plan together to deal with mutual local and regional concerns and to mainstream Planetary Health into routine sectoral dialogue, planning, fund-seeking and budgeting processes and within programmatic and institutional structures;
21. **strengthen** the Healthy Islands Vision and the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Blue Pacific narrative by developing a suite of reportable indices that will draw from, and be aligned with, existing reportable and accountability measures including SDG targets;
22. **recognise** Indigenous leadership and local cultural knowledge as foundational and universally meaningful, and actively seek the engagement of Indigenous leaders in decision-making;
23. **regard** the measures above as an essential response to a complex and uncertain world, where long term research is imperative to understanding interactions between SDGs and must be built into the fabric of learning and decision-making, and where adaptive management strategies must be encouraged and supported; and
24. **develop and widely communicate** applied research evidence, educational resources and case study exemplars that promote awareness to guide and motivate positive attitudes and behaviour and support scaled-up actions.



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