



Editorial

Our planet, our health

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The World Health Day is celebrated every year on 7 April to commemorate the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948. Each year, a theme is chosen that highlights an area of priority concern for the WHO. In the face of the current pandemic, a polluted planet and an increasing incidence of diseases, the theme for the World Health Day 2022 is **Our Planet, Our Health**. This call from PAHO, the WHO and partners present a unique opportunity for a green and healthy recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that puts the health of individuals and the planet at the centre of actions and fosters a movement to create societies focused on well-being.

The WHO estimates that more than 13 million deaths around the world each year are due to avoidable environmental causes. This includes the climate crisis which is the single biggest health threat facing humanity. The climate crisis is also a health crisis. Our political, social and commercial decisions are driving the climate and health crisis. Over 90% of people breathe unhealthy air resulting from burning of fossil fuels. A heating world is seeing mosquitos spread diseases farther and faster than ever before. Extreme weather events, land degradation and water scarcity are displacing people and affecting their health. Pollution and plastics are found at the bottom of our deepest oceans, the highest mountains and have made their way into our food chain. Systems that produce highly processed, unhealthy foods and beverages are driving a wave of obesity, increasing cancer and heart disease while generating a third of global greenhouse gas emissions.

While the COVID-19 pandemic showed us the healing power of science, it also highlighted the inequities in our world. The pandemic has revealed weaknesses in all areas of society and underlined the urgency of creating sustainable well-being societies committed to achieving equitable health now and for the future generations without breaching ecological limits. The present design of the economy leads to inequitable distribution of income, wealth and power, with too many people still living in poverty and instability. A well-being economy has human well-being, equity and ecological sustainability as its goals. These goals are translated into long-term investments, well-being budgets, social protection and legal and fiscal strategies. Breaking these cycles of destruction for the planet and human health requires legislative action, corporate reform and individuals to be supported and incentivised to make healthy choices.

In recent decades, enhancements in health services, environmental protection, economic development and other factors have led to improvements in the health of people across the globe. Nevertheless, an estimated 1 million premature deaths per year are attributable to known avoidable environmental risks. Air pollution, contaminated water, inadequate sanitation including solid waste management, risks related to certain hazardous chemicals and negative impacts of climate change are the most pressing environmental public health threats. These threats to public health are compounded by weak governance practices and potential inequities

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in health as well as by limited leadership, expertise and resources in the health sector.

However, the theme of **Our Planet, Our Health** should be a powerful reminder to us that the resolution of many of these issues is beyond the exclusive purview of the health sector

and, as a consequence, an effective response will demand whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches.

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