

PCI's Commitment to Planetary Health: Listening, Learning, Taking Action

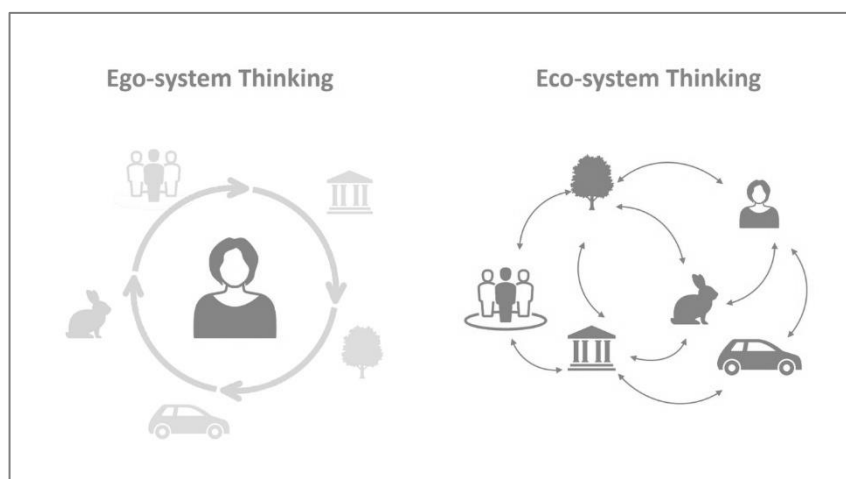
Understanding Planetary Health

Planetary health is about the equitable co-existence of all people alongside our planet. Committing to planetary health is to contribute to:

- halting and mitigating against climatic trends such as global warming and ocean level rises;
- reversing ecological decline;
- protecting human and animal health;
- preventing biodiversity collapse.

This is our collective responsibility towards future generations; every organisation and individual has a part to play. Put simply, planetary health is the health of human civilisation and the state of the natural systems on which it depends.

The diagram below¹ further illustrates the shift in thinking necessary for ecological balance and the need to re-think the primacy of neoliberal / industrial / capitalist growth models.



Planetary Health and Primary Care

Primary care providers play a critical role in stronger and more equitable health care systems and act to safeguard vulnerable communities from harm – preventing ill-health as well as treating it. Vulnerable communities with restricted recourse to capital and resources are often the most vulnerable to effects of climate change and in this sense, safeguarding communities against the changing climate is integral to the holistic remit of primary care.

As an organisation focused on strengthening primary healthcare, our starting point is therefore to reimagine primary care in the era of planetary health.

This is a relatively new field and therefore PCI hopes to also contribute to global learning around the idea of making primary care/global health more planetary health-oriented, through examples, experiences, case studies, and research.

¹ Credit: Systems Innovations Network London (diagram re-coloured for this document)
<https://www.systemsinnovation.network/>

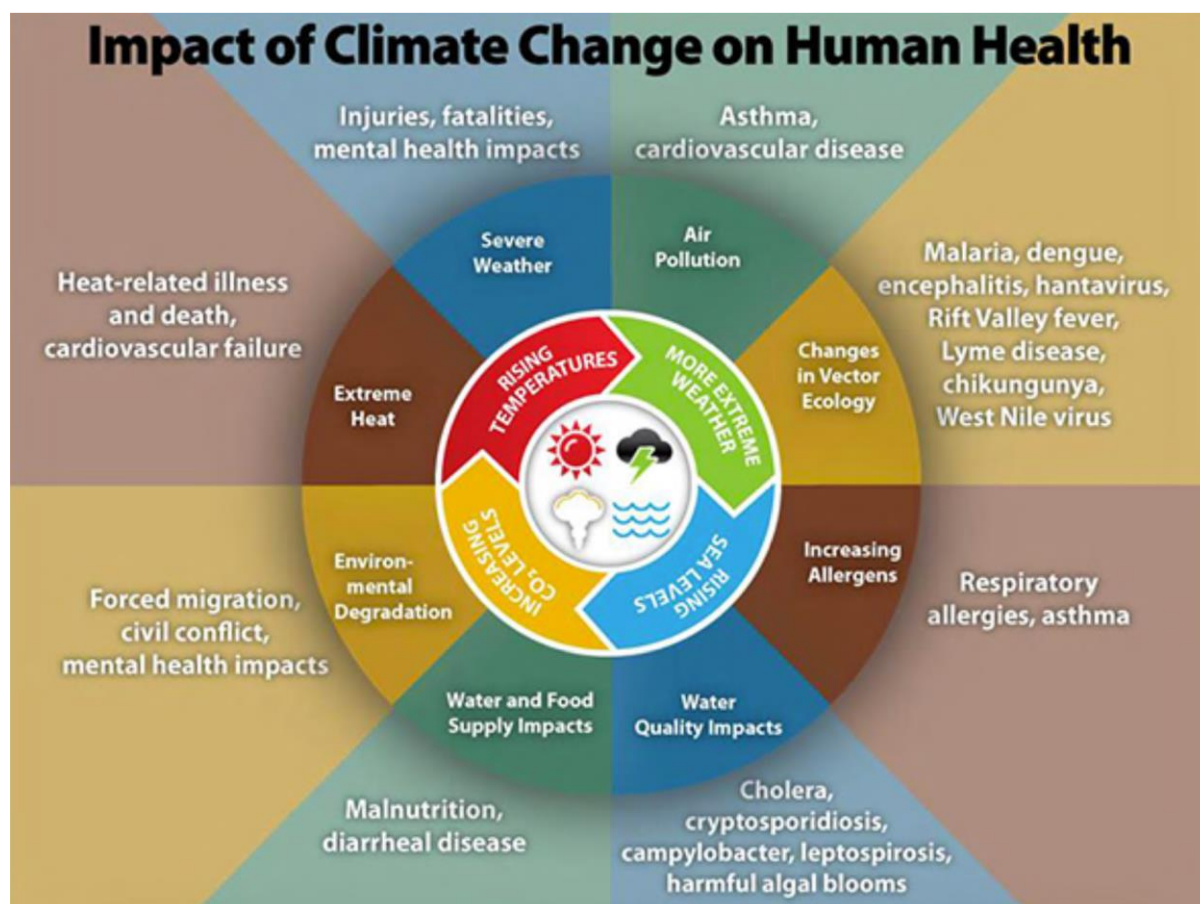
Planetary Health and the Health Workforce

A WHO-Civil Society Working Group Open letter² summarises the complex emergency inter-relationships between human and planetary health before us, particularly as it relates to healthcare workers:

Human health is inextricably linked to planetary health. From floods to wildfires to heat emergencies, climate change is already impacting health and health systems with disadvantaged and Indigenous communities being affected the most. Health professionals have an ethical and professional responsibility to be familiar with both current and future climate change and environmental health threats in order to fulfill duties to their patients and to society. Responses to a global health emergency, whether a pandemic or a climate disaster, air pollution or biodiversity loss, need resilient health systems and a highly proactive, skilled and committed health workforce. One of the key strategies to achieve resilient, low-carbon health systems is to strengthen educational and training programs for all health professionals. Health systems must also do their part to reduce the global greenhouse gas emissions produced in the delivery of healthcare services.

The diagram below³ supports us to further understand the implications of climate change on human health and provides us with practical starting points for our own work.

PCI focuses on strengthening primary healthcare with a particular focus on supporting healthcare workers with learning, professional development and leadership for systems change. Work to engage the health workforce in understanding their role working on climate and health is therefore a natural focus for our emerging work.



² [A call for strengthening climate change education for all health professionals; open letter from WHO-Civil Society Group on Climate and Health, 2022](#)

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/effects/default.htm>

As PCI's develops its thinking around climate and health, we acknowledge two important principles:

- **Inverse correlation of cause and effect.** Healthcare workers in low and middle-income countries where PCI typically works are responsible for very little of the environmental damage that we are now witnessing yet they find themselves dealing with its devastating effects on peoples' health. The cumulative emissions of greenhouse gases from so-called 'developed countries' is inversely proportional to the per capita mortality from climate change⁴. This injustice must be front and centre of our minds as we move forward with our work.
- **Systemic resilience vs individual resilience in the context of social capital.** The meaning of resilience and its implications for our work. In the context of climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines resilience as "*the ability of social, economic, and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event, trend, or disturbance, responding or reconfiguring in ways that preserve their essential function, identity, and structure while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation.*"⁵ Yet it must also be acknowledged that resilience at the level of the individual or community is often called upon. This individual resilience is itself highly dependent on access to social capital and networks which are likely to be diminished in a context of environmental degradation, displacement and competition over resources.

A Framework for Action

A business with a just and regenerative mindset pursues a future in which social and environmental systems are thriving; planetary health has been rapidly stabilised; human rights are universally respected; fairer ways to create and distribute value have been adopted; and resilience and vitality across generations and geographies is supported⁶.

This way of thinking takes us beyond risk mitigation, beyond zero harm, beyond doing good. It challenges us to build capacity for justice and regeneration, taking responsibility for the climate crisis and ecological damage that we have created, lifting the burden from those who carry the consequences of this damage, and taking collective action to ensure that alongside our own actions as an organisation are coupled with an integration of planetary health concepts into our work on a programmatic level as we learn with and from healthcare workers around the world.

Thus PCI's work in this domain has three key strands:

1. **Risk mitigation / moving towards zero harm as an organisation**
2. **Intentional integration of planetary health perspectives into PCI programmes**
3. **A commitment to partnerships around planetary health**

⁴ Map projections from Patz et al, WHO, 2007

⁵ <https://www.learning4impact.org/content/measuring-the-climate-resilience-of-health-systems-885>

⁶ [A Compass for Just and Regenerative Business](#), Forum for the Future, 2021

PCI's Commitment to Planetary health – Framework for Action		
<p>1. Risk mitigation / moving towards zero harm as an organisation</p>	<p>We seek to minimise the impact of our work on the environment. In practice, this means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consider carefully whether air travel is needed as part of a project or programme of work, focusing any international travel only on work that cannot be fully realised through remote methods. PCI's travel policy and decision-making protocols ensure that carbon footprint is taken into account alongside security, value for money and impact before approval is given. • We have, and will continue, to globalise our pool of Associate experts. Thus if in-person meetings and other activities are needed to deliver impact, we will draw on Associates living in the country or region as far as possible to minimise our carbon footprint. • We have invested in, developed, and launched our flagship PCI Academy as a home for all our learning programmes. This digital platform hosts blended learning through online learning, live workshops and communities of practice. Our data tells us that results and impact from remote learning on the Academy is equal to face-to-face learning. • When we do travel internationally, we make carbon offsetting contributions against all our air travel and mileage. • We are a virtual and paperless team. When we do meet in person, we encourage staff and Associates to travel by public transport where possible. • We provide only vegetarian/vegan food at any event we are organising. 	<p>Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create a 'planetary health' hub on Basecamp for all those across PCI who are interested to share resources and collaborate ✓ Conduct a green audit to identify any areas for further improvements ✓ Monitor international travel to ensure adherence to policy ✓ Annually review PCI's commitment to planetary health
<p>2. Intentional integration of planetary health perspectives into PCI programmes</p>	<p>There is significant scope to <i>include planetary health considerations as a core pillar in PCI learning programmes</i>, potentially through a dedicated learning programme and/or by integrating relevant concepts throughout existing learning programmes.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the role of primary healthcare systems in preventing harm; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ by reducing referrals to carbon-intensive secondary/tertiary care ○ by minimising use of harmful materials in supply chains and waste management ○ targeting lifestyle advice towards plant-based diets and active travel • Awareness of how climate change is affecting people's environment and the impact of climatic trends and events such as air pollution, flooding, drought on peoples' health and well-being as well as the emergence of new or previously rare disease as a result of biodiversity imbalances / changing climate and trends; • Understanding of how to anticipate and mitigate against environmental stressors to improve individual quality of life by making linkages, understanding warning signs (in terms of clinical presentations) and developing mitigation strategies; 	<p>Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Setting up a working group to drive this work forward ✓ Mapping existing resources and training available support ✓ Leverage high level policy support of countries signed up to WHO's COP26 health programme⁷ ✓ Convene at least one Associate workshop (e.g. a session at Away Day) to increase awareness and crowd-source ideas for integrating climate awareness into new / existing content

⁷ <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-11-2021-countries-commit-to-develop-climate-smart-health-care-at-cop26-un-climate-conference>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of system-level improvements that can lead to more climate-resilient PHC systems; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By developing approaches to providing consistency of care to mobile / displaced populations 	✓ Securing resources to integrate planetary health concepts into PCI learning programmes
	PCI also needs to build internal awareness in its Associate network so that risk factors and strategies to deal with climate-related events are better understood and can be integrated in contextually relevant ways across the project portfolio. For example, understanding the impact of extreme heat will help a PCI project team to have better informed discussions with partners about protocols to protect those who are most vulnerable.	
	PCI will also work to develop a shared understanding of the ways in which existing work contributes to stronger health systems in the context of climate change ; including ability to communicate this to partners and healthcare workers. For example, work done in an acute emergency setting in the context of 'natural disasters' can also be understood as a response to extreme weather events. Even if a particular disaster is not seen as part of a trend of climatic events, the learning from this setting could be refined and applied in the context of other extreme weather events which are forecast to increase significantly in frequency in the coming years. Our work in St Vincents and the Grenadines ⁸ , for example, could be understood within this narrative.	
3.A commitment to partnerships around planetary health	<p>Realising planetary health is urgent and complex. It is the responsibility of us all to play our part. PCI recognises that there are practical strategies for the integration of planetary health into our ways of working as a learning organisation, not only to reduce ecological harm, but to support others to mitigate against the impacts of climate change in their own settings. There are already many tools that have been developed and we will not re-invent the wheel. We will leverage open source tools, resources and advice as well as forging strategic partnerships which deepen our understanding, knowledge and impact in this area.</p> <p>In doing so, PCI will identify emerging initiatives in the healthcare space where PCI's pragmatic learning can contribute to increased understanding, awareness and action to reduce ecological harm and support mitigation efforts for vulnerable populations, with a focus on how healthcare can be organised to ensure quality access to primary care whether in the context of extreme weather events, living with chronic climate-related stress (heat, flooding, drought) or migration.</p> <p>There are other types of work that PCI is not well positioned to do, particularly around policy and lobbying with government and business. This catalytic campaign work is essential to future planetary health, and PCI will demonstrate solidarity and support to such campaigns, following and amplifying the voices of others, by signing open letters and through social media.</p> <p>As well as this, to ensure that steps to reduce our footprint on the planet become a central pillar to the organisation's work, informing infrastructure decisions, ways of working and programmatic design, PCI will annually review this policy and the partnerships that it enters into.</p>	Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Further mapping of actors in the climate and health space, monitoring activity and identifying opportunities for learning or collaboration ✓ Join the Action for Global Health climate group

⁸ [Deploying Emergency Kits for Noncommunicable Diseases, Following the Volcano Eruption in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines - PAHO/WHO | Pan American Health Organization](#), published June 2022

Organisations and Resources

Planetary Health Alliance
Global Climate and Health Alliance
Healthcare Without Harm
Forum for the Future
Action for Global Health Climate group
WHO Climate group
Greener Practice