



# Canada needs an Institute for Research on Environments, Health and Wellbeing

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# Our concern

**We are part of a national Working Group on Planetary Health and Societal Wellbeing.**

**We began with the following concerns:**

- **Global ecological changes – the Anthropocene, for short, and including climate change – are a major - and arguably an existential - threat to health and wellbeing**
- **There is no CIHR Institute for research on environment and health**



# We are waging war on nature

- **Climate change alone has been called “the single biggest health threat facing humanity” by the WHO**
- **UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has said: “Humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal”**



# Academic Health Institutions' Declaration on Planetary Health

**Academic health institutions declare the health of the planet a Code Red emergency and call for immediate implementation of planetary health education and research, and the transition to climate-resilient and low-carbon health systems in order to build a healthy, sustainable, and just future for all.**

**Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada**

**15 April 2023**



# The built environment matters too

**While we live 100% of the time within natural ecosystems**

- **We spend 90% of our time indoors, and**
- **We are more than 80% urbanised**

**This means the natural environment and the built environments it contains are hugely important factors continuously shaping the health of humans and all species.**

- **“First we shape our buildings, then they shape us.”**

**Sir Winston Churchill**



# Environmental justice is a key issue

- The impacts of both the massive and rapid global ecological changes and the design and quality of our built environment are not experienced equally.
- There is a growing awareness and recognition that future pathways must centre the autonomy, knowledge, perspectives and practices of Indigenous Peoples in the face of global ecological and societal crises.
- The important roles of global Indigenous Peoples' leadership and ways of knowing have been recognized in several recent UN reports as well as by the UN Secretary General.



# Reconciliation must include the earth

- **“reconciliation will never occur unless we are also reconciled with the earth.”**

**Report of the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

- **Such reconciliation, after centuries of colonization, requires a decolonizing lens for future research investment, infrastructure, and relations.**



# Our position

**The absence of an Institute devoted to the study of environments, health and wellbeing is untenable as human-induced changes to our planetary life support systems are becoming a major threat to the health of humans and all species, in Canada and around the world.**





# Societal need

**Canada needs a new Institute focused on environments, health and wellbeing to research the impacts of environmental change on human health and wellbeing, and on health systems, and engender a next generation of innovative, evidence-informed actions that not only reduce harm but seek to improve the natural and built environment by addressing the drivers of environmental change.**



# Complex interdisciplinary work

- **This research should also consider social, political, economic, legal and related drivers of ecosystem decline and unhealthy built environments, and how these drivers shape health and wellbeing for all. Such research can contribute to the creation of a Wellbeing Society.**
- **This is in line with the recent report of the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System, which noted the “increasingly complex, collaborative, multi- and interdisciplinary work needed to address the world’s most pressing challenges.”.**



# Collaborate with other disciplines

- Recognize that optimising human health is one of the most persuasive motivators for change and collaborate with other disciplines such as engineering, agriculture, architecture, urban planning, communications, behavioural sciences, and art to **de-silo efforts and lead planetary health research, policy, and advocacy aimed at real-world implementation of solutions.**

*Academic Health Institutions'  
Declaration on Planetary Health  
15 April 2023*



# Areas of focus include, but are not limited to:

- **Global ecological change (planetary health, eco-health and one health)**
- **Indigenous Peoples' knowledges and approaches.**
- **Political economy and political ecology of health and wellbeing**
- **Environmental exposure, epidemiology and toxicology**
- **The built environment**
- **Environmental justice**
- **Community-based participatory research**
- **Environmentally sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient health care and supply chain**
- **Implementation science and evaluation of impact**



# The benefits to Canada

- **As a society, we need to understand the drivers of the environmental challenges we face, the changes that are needed to address them, and the best ways to meet those challenges, make those changes and track progress.**
- **We need the research capacity that would enable Canada to undertake the complex, collaborative, multi- and interdisciplinary work needed to address Canada's and the world's most pressing challenges with respect to environments, health and wellbeing.**



- **This research would enable the transition to a Wellbeing Society that ensures equitable health now and for future generations without breaching ecological limits, as well as supporting health systems in becoming sustainable, low carbon and resilient.**
- **Preparing early career researchers and next-generation scholars for the challenges we are amidst, and to position Canada on the international stage as leaders in this space.**



# Members of the Working Group on Environments and Health Research

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