



ACCELERATING EVIDENCE-INFORMED ACTION ON PLANETARY HEALTH

at The George Institute for Global Health





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Climate change is the greatest health and humanitarian crisis the world has ever seen. Global heating and related environmental shifts are driving rising rates of illness and disease, and exacerbating deep-seated inequities, particularly in communities already experiencing marginalisation.

The impact of climate change is supercharged by unhealthy and unsustainable environments where people live, play, learn and work. The global food system, for example, promotes the consumption of poor diets that are fueling a pandemic of non-communicable diseases. It also contributes to environmental degradation through greenhouse gas emissions, unsustainable water extraction and deforestation.

The George Institute for Global Health is an independent research institute dedicated to improving the health of millions of people worldwide. We have major offices in Australia, China, India and the United Kingdom. A planetary health lens is embedded into our research and advocacy, and we aim to lead by example by ramping up our internal

sustainability efforts. The George Institute seeks to ensure that evidence informs the development and implementation of social, economic, and environmental policies to address climate change and other urgent global health challenges and to improve planetary health outcomes.

We are committed to placing at the heart of our work Traditional Knowledges of First Nations and Tribal Peoples and the voices of other communities experiencing marginalisation. We work closely with these communities, stakeholders and policymakers at local, national and global levels to address and reverse the ongoing impacts of climate change on human health and equity.

The George Institute has established a dedicated Planetary Health Working Group to consolidate and accelerate our work. This is outlined in our current five-year strategy and annual organisation-wide goals. What follows is a summary of recent and ongoing activities that highlight our passion and commitment to improving planetary health.

Climate Change and Non-Communicable Diseases

Multiple, mutually reinforcing environmental crises are having a significant impact on the rates and severity of non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular and kidney diseases, mental health conditions and injuries. The George Institute is leveraging our international expertise to build the evidence base on the impacts of climate change on health outcomes, enabling us to develop innovative solutions to reduce and/or reverse these impacts.

Global Health Research Centre on Non-Communicable Diseases and Environmental Change: The George Institute is establishing a dedicated centre in collaboration with Imperial College London. Led by The George Institute's offices in India, the centre will co-produce world-leading implementation research with local communities in Bangladesh, India and Indonesia. Design will be in collaboration with academics, policymakers, environmental agencies, communities and health and medical service providers. The program of work focuses on a multi-pronged approach to strengthen primary care provision in each country and mitigate an environmental challenge in each context: air pollution in Indonesia; agricultural diversity in India; and water salinity in Bangladesh.



Climate Change and Dementia: The George Institute in collaboration with the Centre on Climate Change and Planetary Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine is exploring the links between climate change and dementia. We found that as *temperatures rise, the United Kingdom can expect to see increased emergency department dementia admissions.*

Climate Change and Kidney Disease: The George Institute is *working with coastal agricultural communities in Andhra Pradesh in India*, who are particularly vulnerable to climate change, and who face a very high burden of kidney disease with an unknown cause. We are assessing *kidney health risks due to environmental heat stress*, with a focus on improving occupational health policy.



Healthy and Sustainable Food and Water Systems

Billions of people around the world suffer from malnutrition in all its forms. The food system is one of the largest contributors to environmental degradation through greenhouse gas emissions, water use and deforestation. It is also one of the sectors hardest hit by climate change. The George Institute is using a range of expertise in clinical trials, digital tools, behaviour change and regulatory tools to develop practical solutions at the intersection of diet-related disease and environmental degradation from food systems. We are collaborating with communities most impacted to advocate for the inclusion of unheard voices in decision-making processes.

Healthy Food, Healthy Planet, Healthy People Centre for Research Excellence: Access to information about the nutritional quality and environmental impacts of the food we eat is a basic consumer right yet is currently lacking. The George Institute-led *Healthy Food, Healthy Planet, Healthy People Centre for Research Excellence* is delivering world-leading innovations in nutrient profiling algorithms and environmental indicators that estimate the human and planetary consequences of varying patterns of food and beverage consumption.



Planetary Health Rating: The George Institute developed the FoodSwitch app, which includes a *Planetary Health Rating* to help consumers in 17 countries make *more informed choices* about the healthiness and sustainability of the products they consume. This rating applies to all items within a category of foods and is based on 'CO2 equivalent' emissions, but will soon also be able to calculate emissions within food categories, as *our researchers continue to build the evidence base*.

Food and Water for Life Program in Australia: This program is led by the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) and Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, in collaboration with DEG's University of New South Wales Yuwaya Ngarra-li partners and The George Institute. *The Food and Water for Life program* grew from projects developed in response to findings from *Walgett's Food Forum* in April 2019. It addresses a range of food and water security and environmental concerns affecting the First Nations Walgett community. The program aims to respond to immediate needs while also supporting sustainable systemic changes.



Australia-Pacific Perspective on Unheard Voices in Food and Water Systems: The inclusion of Traditional Knowledges and First Nations and Pacific Island priorities in healthy and sustainable food and water systems is crucial. Ahead of the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit, The George Institute partnered with the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and Dharriwaa Elders Group in New South Wales, Australia, and the Pacific Research Centre for the Prevention of Obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases in Fiji, to develop the report '*Whose paradigm counts? An Australia-Pacific perspective on unheard voices in food and water systems*'.

Food Production and Supply: Around the world, food systems continue to be disrupted by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. Informed by our research, The George Institute developed guidance on how to improve systems to ensure a healthy, sustainable supply of food in times of crisis, *contributing a submission* and evidence to the New South Wales Parliament's Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning Inquiry into Food Production and Supply.

Climate Change and Injury

Climate change affects habitats and increases the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. It results in changes to land use and human migration, which in turn shifts human behaviours and creates new areas of risk for human health. The George Institute is leveraging behavioural research and advocacy expertise to build the evidence base on these changes and recommend policy interventions to safeguard population health.

Snakebite Burden: Snakebite is responsible for up to 138,000 deaths worldwide every year, with nearly 2.7 million people suffering serious injuries and permanent disabilities, and is therefore a major public health challenge. An increase in the frequency and intensity of climate-related extreme weather events is *likely to modify snake-human-environment interactions*, leading to an increase in the snakebite burden. The George Institute is assessing evidence on the impact of climate change on snakebite burden, *calling* for recognition of the importance of snakes in biodiversity and human health.

Lowering Speed on Streets: With a growing global population and urbanisation, cities are facing huge pressures in terms of population density, transport, air quality, access to opportunities for physical activity, and climate change. The George Institute is exploring how these challenges intersect, and have *proposed setting and enforcing urban speed limits of 30km/h or less* with co-benefits for human health and the planet.



Image courtesy of RNLI Lifeboats

Drowning Epidemic: The frequency and severity of flooding events continues to rise as the climate crisis worsens. The World Health Organization reports nearly 372,000 drowning deaths each year. It is estimated that more than half of these occur in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific Region. Little is known about the impact on communities, both socially and economically. The George Institute is *conducting research into better safety and education around water* in Bangladesh, India and Vietnam.



An Economy for People and Planet

A wellbeing economy prioritises the wellbeing of people and planet over unsustainable extraction and consumption, using indicators of wellbeing such as equity, happiness, and environmental outcomes, for current and future generations. The George Institute is leveraging its research, advocacy and policy expertise to engage with local and national governments on measures to support systemic shifts to wellbeing economy approaches.

Wellbeing Economy and Government: The George Institute undertook an analysis of how a wellbeing approach could be *incorporated into the business of government*, drawing on a number of international case studies to consider the feasibility of a wellbeing economy in Australia. We also brought together experts from the health, community,

environment, research, and youth sectors to discuss how a wellbeing economy might be implemented in Victoria, Australia. We developed a *report outlining what a wellbeing economy can do*, and hosted a *virtual panel discussion* exploring how a wellbeing economy might improve social, health and environmental outcomes.

Raising Awareness of Climate Impacts on Health and Equity

Through advocacy and thought leadership, The George Institute is helping to drive a meaningful shift in the planetary health landscape at local, regional and global levels. We are engaging with key stakeholders, sharing insights and fostering discussions to stimulate debate, guide critical policy decisions and facilitate evidence-informed change.

COP26: Before, during and after the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2021 (COP26), The George Institute:

- Called for *'triple-win actions on climate, health and equity to pull humanity back from the brink'*.
- Called for *an urgent phase out of fossil fuels*.
- Called for the Australian Government to *increase climate commitments for the betterment of health outcomes*.
- *Responded* to COP26 commitments.
- Contributed to the *Action for Global Health Position Paper on Health Inequalities and Climate Change* highlighting the linkages between climate change and global health, and recommending actions to improve the health of people and planet. We are a member of the Action for Global Health network, which convenes more than 50 UK-based organisations working in global health, and play an active role in its 'Climate Change and Global Health Inequity' working group, which advocates for stronger UK and global action in this field.

World Health Day 2022: The George Institute's Principal Director Professor Robyn Norton wrote an opinion article for the Australian Institute of International Affairs on the importance of *'Pulling Back From the Brink: Embracing a Planetary Health Approach'*.

Air Pollution and Health: The George Institute's annual 2021 Evidence to Policy Lecture was delivered by Professor Frank J Kelly of Imperial College London on *'Air pollution and health: how climate change is increasing both acute and chronic disease risk'*.

Intersectoral Action for Planetary Health: The George Institute hosted world-leading experts for a webinar on *'The intersectoral action needed for the future health of people and planet'* in 2021. The speakers went on to publish an *opinion article in the BMJ* on the same subject. A further *opinion article in the BMJ* called for a reframing of the narrative on the climate catastrophe, to focus on systems change, rather than individual action, to avoid letting the fossil fuel industry and governments off the hook.

Human Rights and Climate Change: Climate change is having a significant impact on human rights and health outcomes. In 2020, The George Institute's Healthier Societies Director Professor Kent Buse and colleagues published an opinion article on *the connection between human rights and healthy, safe environments*. In 2021, we co-hosted an international conference on *'Health and Human Rights in the Climate Crisis'* with the Australian Human Rights Institute, UNSW Sydney and the Institute on Inequalities in Global Health, University of Southern California. We published an article with our co-hosts on *'The right to a healthy environment: making it matter'*.

Environmentally Friendly Menstrual Hygiene Practices: Greater awareness and uptake of environmentally friendly menstrual hygiene practices is urgently needed around the world. The George Institute developed a podcast, *'Perspectives, Practices, and Environmental Footprints of menstrual hygiene management in India'* on the different menstrual products and practices, highlighting the challenges and misinformation that exist in this space.

The George Institute Sustainability Audit: A planetary health approach requires that all of us step up. This includes the health sector, which is responsible for up to five percent of total global greenhouse gas emissions. The George Institute is committed to reducing its carbon footprint. Recently a sustainability audit was completed to identify strategies that can accelerate decarbonisation efforts across our operations and research programs. We are committed to sharing what we learn, including with other health and medical research stakeholders who may benefit from the insights we gain.



To find out more please visit our website or contact:

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