## University of Sydney

# IS THERE A ROLE FOR THE HEALTHY CITIES MOVEMENT IN A PLANETARY HEALTH DISCOURSE?

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## BACKGROUND

*We are now living in the Anthropocene era. This is a time in earth's modern history marked by an exponential growth in population, wealth and consumption of resources. However, getting to this point in history has resulted in dichotomous outcomes. On one hand, the world has experienced staggering economic, scientific and technological advancement, while on the other, the systematic destruction of the Earth's natural resources has led to significant and irreversible environmental changes.*

*A key factor in these environmental changes is the unrelenting increase in the world's population over time, and the resultant demands on the environment to accommodate this. More specifically, the ongoing population increase has resulted in the exponential increase in the number and size of cities across the world, to a point where the urban population now represents a 55% majority of the world's urban/rural population split (DESA, 2017).*

## OBJECTIVES

*Firstly to bring greater clarity and focus to the relationship between urbanisation and health by exploring both the global drivers of health and the disparate meanings of 'urban health'. Secondly, to outline the Healthy Cities movement (HCM) and the Planetary Health discourse.*
*Thirdly, explore the function of the HCM from the lens of a planetary health paradigm.*

## METHODS

*An integrative review methodology was used to critique and synthesize secondary data on urban health, the growing planetary health discourse and the Healthy Cities Movement (HCM). Collectively, key literature was used to consider the ways in which the HCM might be leveraged as a practical vehicle for the planetary health discourse.*

## FINDINGS

*Key findings include:*

- *There is a two way relationship between urbanisation and climate change, which has ongoing impacts on health outcomes. That is, urbanisation might be driving climate change, however it is important to understand how climate change will impact on the form and function of cities.*

- *With the ongoing process of urbanisation, the health of billions will rely on cities being able to provide environments that are conducive to health. With this comes a difficult dichotomy – cities are simultaneously powerful forces for health, but also generators of significant environmental degradation and health inequalities*

- *Urban Health has a variety of meanings. In a planetary health discourse, urban health should refer to both the health of urban populations, and the health of the urban environment itself.*

- *Planetary health is not a shift away from the core principles of sustainable development, but is a progression of sustainable development. It shifts the focus away from ensuring adequate resources in the future, to advocating for adaptation to a changing climate and promoting active stewardship over the earth.*

- *Planetary health also recognises that contemporary health gains have come at the cost of health of future generations, and rallies for humans and the environment to exist in a harmonious and reciprocal manner.*

- *There is a resounding agreement within the HCM and planetary health discourse that health and the environment are inherently connected. Both recognise that health is a product of multiple determinants - that political, social and environmental factors direct health outcomes and health behaviours.*

## CONCLUSION

The conceptual overlap between the Healthy Cities Movement and the Planetary Health discourse means that there are vast examples of existing policies and projects that have been run by the HCM that could be used to promote and demonstrate policy approaches that encapsulate planetary health.

The Planetary Health discourse could make effective use of the existing networks and resources available through the HCM to expand its reach

While it is not the role of the HCM to refine or expand the Planetary Health discourse, it can play a significant role by instigating key policies and project that build healthy urban environments from a 'stewardship' perspective, and building a global network of actors.