



International Family Nursing Association (IFNA)

# POSITION STATEMENT ON PLANETARY HEALTH AND FAMILY HEALTH

## Overview

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The International Family Nursing Association (IFNA) believes that nurses worldwide should understand how the health of the planet affects families, and family nurses should collaborate to act on this relationship through education, research and practice.

The purpose of this position statement is:

1. To inform IFNA members, educators, researchers, practitioners, other healthcare professionals, policy makers, and the public of the link between planetary health and family health; and
2. To offer direction and support for family nursing education, research, and practice on the topic of planetary health as it relates to family health.

## IFNA Core Values and Mission

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IFNA embraces a compassionate family focus on health, social justice, human dignity, and respect for all (IFNA, 2020). These core values inform the mission of the organization, which is to transform family health by serving as a unifying force and voice for family nursing globally; sharing knowledge, practices, and skills to enhance and nurture family nursing practice; and providing family nursing leadership through education, research, scholarship, socialization, and collegial exchange on all aspects of family nursing.

## Definitions

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*Family nursing* is the integration of nursing care to the family as a whole and individual family members, with attention to relationships among members (Denham, 2003; Friedman et al., 2003; Wright & Leahey, 2013). *Family health* incorporates the health of the collective and the interaction of the health of the individual with the collective, and reflects an interaction of biopsychosocial and contextual phenomena (IFNA Position Statement on Generalist Competencies for Family Nursing Practice, 2015). *Global health* is a complex concept that encompasses multiple themes focusing on improving human health worldwide according to the Global Advisory Panel on the Future of Nursing (Wilson, et al., 2016). A concise definition proposed by Beaglehole (2010) is, a “collaborative trans-national research and action for promoting health for all” (p. 5142). *Planetary health* is focused on characterizing the linkages between human-caused disruptions of earth’s natural systems and the resulting impacts on human health (Planetary Health Alliance, 2019). Global health and planetary health are interlinked concepts that are not easily disentangled.

## Background

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Changes in the earth’s ecosystems from human behavior are resulting in instability of the earth’s climate and affecting human health at an unprecedented rate; these changes require urgent action (Whitmee et al., 2015). Disruptions in planetary health are negatively affecting air and water quality, food security, and living conditions at local and global levels (Attademo & Bernardini, 2017; Bell et al., 2017; Filippelli & Taylor, 2018; Haines, 2016). Human behaviors also facilitate pandemic illness that destabilize families and communities. Understanding and acting on these challenges requires cross-disciplinary and global collaboration (Planetary Health Alliance, 2019). Family health is impacted by planetary health. The United Nations Environment Programme (Eakins et al., 2019) highlights that “a healthy environment is both a prerequisite and a foundation for economic prosperity, human health, and wellbeing”. The effects of urbanization, natural disasters, and climate change on human health are widespread and include increasing rates of acute and chronic health conditions, increasing ranges of vector-borne diseases, food shortages resulting from crop failure, and rising mortality rates due to extreme weather events such as heat waves (Myers, 2017; Whitmee et al., 2015). Local instability in low-resource countries due to food and water shortages and extreme weather events and disasters is contributing to large-scale human migration (Podesta, 2019).

These environmental impacts have important consequences for family health through the interaction of biopsychosocial and contextual phenomena. Physical health impacts include respiratory and cardiac health alterations, malnutrition, increased risk of vector borne diseases, and water borne diseases (Whitmee et al., 2015). Water and food shortages, extreme

weather events, and community displacement increase stress and can lead to mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder as well as increased risk of violence (Myers, 2017). These impacts may result in abuse and neglect of young and old family members and intimate partner violence, with effects through generations at macro and micro (i.e., epigenetic) levels (Van Wert et al., 2019).

Governmental and organizational leaders are responding to these challenges by building communities of practice in planetary health education, research, and policy (Almada et al., 2017; Planetary Health Alliance, 2019). Actions to improve conditions for planetary health are not only possible, they are highly cost effective and can have notable positive effects on human health (Landrigan et al., 2018; Patz, 2016). With its focus on characterizing the linkages between the earth’s natural systems and public health, a planetary health framework highlights the need for changes in resource use and allocation to protect human health now and into the future. It is important to note that populations most vulnerable to changes in the earth’s systems are often those using the least amount of resources and having little power over environmental change in the countries using the most resources. Activities used to support planetary health should be evaluated through an equity lens in order to ensure the health and well-being of all is positively impacted.

## Position Statement

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Given IFNA's core values, organizational mission, and assertion that health within the family and health of the family within its environment are central phenomena of family nursing, IFNA has a key role to play in influencing planetary health and recognizing the connection between planetary health and family health. As a global organization, IFNA can take action by reducing our environmental impact and educating our members, other health professionals, the public, and policy-makers about the connection between planetary health and family health.

We believe that incorporating a planetary health lens in family nursing education, research, and practice will positively influence family health. In addition, we believe that actions at an organizational level will also promote family health by minimizing our own negative impact on the environment. Therefore, IFNA upholds the following as essential activities and outcomes for the organization:

1. **Teaching future nurses about the relevance of planetary health to family health**  
Pre-licensure and graduate nursing programs should include content on planetary health and the sustainable development goals to a.) raise consciousness within the nursing profession regarding how degradation of planet earth affects human health and b.) develop strategies to preserve and promote human health (Whitmee et al., 2015; United Nations, 2015). Family nursing educators are well-positioned to teach future nurses about planetary health as an example of biopsychosocial and contextual phenomena that influence family health (IFNA Position Statement on Pre-Licensure Family Nursing Education, 2013; IFNA Position Statement on Advanced Practice Competencies for Family Nursing, 2017; IFNA Position Statement on Graduate Family Nursing Education, 2018).
2. **Educating members of IFNA about the relevance of planetary health to family nursing**  
Family nurses must possess fundamental knowledge of planetary health to: understand complex phenomena within families that arise from changes in the earth's ecosystems; apply problem-solving skills to support families' ability to adapt to the ecosystem changes and demonstrate resilience; and achieve outcomes that promote family health. Specifically, IFNA will educate its members about planetary health through routine communication channels such as newsletters, periodic online educational offerings (e.g., webinars), and content presented at bi-annual conferences.
3. **Informing the public, including policymakers about the impact of planetary health on family health**  
Promoting knowledge of planetary health among the general public will serve to raise awareness of the risks families face and the planning required to mitigate untoward outcomes. Providing policymakers with information and proposed actions to stem negative outcomes of ecosystem changes resulting from climate change has the potential to curb negative consequences on families facing challenges because of decline in planetary health (Nicholas & Breakey, 2019).
4. **Using a planetary health lens in formulating research questions about family health**  
Family nurse researchers are called upon to develop programs of research that contribute to knowledge regarding relationships between changes in the earth's ecosystems and impacts on family health, interventions that reduce negative sequelae for families, and structural community supports for adaptation and resilience for families facing challenges as a result of a decline in planetary health.
5. **Contributing to the research agenda for planetary health/human health**  
Family nurses are called upon to examine upstream prevention efforts to mitigate climate sequelae downstream (Leffers & Butterfield, 2018) with the goal of identifying the most promising areas for family nurses to contribute to adaptation and resilience within families. To address planetary health, a mix of research is needed using a variety of methods including epidemiology, big data analysis, action research, and phenomenology. Family nurses are in a unique position to gain insight through their connections with individuals and families and learn about their behaviors as family nurses establish partnerships with communities affected by planetary health.

**6. Assessing families through a planetary health lens in family nursing practice**

Family nurses in generalist practice must be competent in performing family assessment, including mental health assessment, in the context of planetary health and with attention to the social and contextual factors affected by planetary health that influence health and illness (IFNA Position Statement on Generalist Competencies for Family Nursing Practice, 2015). Family nurses in advanced practice are also called upon to appraise the complex reciprocity among individuals, the family, health, and the environment (IFNA Position Statement on Advanced Practice Competencies for Family Nursing, 2017).

**7. Implementing generalist and advanced family nursing practice with a planetary health lens**

Family nurses will help families develop their knowledge of planetary health and the actions they can take to reduce the risk of untoward outcomes resulting from changes in the earth’s ecosystems (Leffers & Butterfield, 2018) while considering the specific needs of family members at various stages of development (Leyva et al., 2017). Family nurses should be competent in the provision of mental health interventions for families affected by environmental events. In advanced family nursing practice, nurses have a responsibility

to advocate for equity and justice for families and to promote environments that safeguard the health of families (IFNA Position Statement on Advanced Practice Competencies for Family Nursing, 2017).

**8. Minimizing our organization’s negative impact on the planet through sustainable practices**

A planetary health lens, systems thinking, and strategic communication can help spur meaningful action toward improving planetary health and human health (Stone et al., 2018). Organizational practices by IFNA that reduce our environmental footprint can have downstream impacts on family health. IFNA can commit to sustainable practices such as limiting unnecessary printing, minimizing waste, following responsible travel practices, and holding “green meetings” (Boggia et al., 2018).

**9. Collaborating with other organizations to remain actively engaged in advocacy and policy efforts related to planetary health**

Active global engagement with experts, other organizations, and governmental entities on the topic of planetary health and its impact on family health will enable IFNA to realize a compassionate family focus on health, social justice, human dignity, and respect for all.

**Conclusion**

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IFNA maintains that family nursing will become increasingly important as changes in the earth’s ecosystems impose unprecedented challenges to families around the world. All nurses should understand principles of planetary health, how changes in the earth’s ecosystems affect families, and what nurses can do to promote health, adaptation, and resilience of individuals and families. Through the activities described in this

position statement, IFNA can reduce its environmental impact and educate its members, other health professionals, the public, and policy-makers about the connection between planetary health and family health. This position statement informs and offers direction to members and the public. Resources to guide action by IFNA and our constituents are listed below.

## Resources for Action

Organizations	<p>Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments: <a href="https://envirn.org/">https://envirn.org/</a></p> <p>Planetary Health Alliance: <a href="https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org">https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org</a></p> <p>Rockefeller Foundation – Planetary Health: <a href="https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/initiatives/planetary-health/">https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/initiatives/planetary-health/</a></p>
Background Information	<p>United Nations Development Programme, Issue Brief on Planetary Health: <a href="https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/issue-brief--planetary-health.html">https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/issue-brief--planetary-health.html</a></p> <p>Sam Myers - Planetary Health: The Future is Now (video): <a href="https://youtu.be/atAU0QJWFi0">https://youtu.be/atAU0QJWFi0</a></p> <p>Howie Frumkin – What is Planetary Health (video): <a href="https://youtu.be/lw_17rhn9eY">https://youtu.be/lw_17rhn9eY</a></p> <p>Safeguarding human health in the Anthropocene epoch: report of The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health: <a href="https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/planetary-health">https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/planetary-health</a></p>
Education	<p>Planetary Health Syllabi: <a href="https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/planetary-health-syllabi">https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/planetary-health-syllabi</a></p> <p>Sustainable healthcare education: integrating planetary health into clinical education: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(18)30246-8">https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(18)30246-8</a></p>
Research	<p>Planetary Health Bibliography: <a href="https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/bibliography">https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/bibliography</a></p>
Sustainable Practices	<p>Center for Responsible Travel (CREST): <a href="https://www.responsibletravel.org/">https://www.responsibletravel.org/</a></p> <p>Global Sustainable Tourism Council: <a href="https://www.gstcouncil.org">https://www.gstcouncil.org</a></p>

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## Credits

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