



Achieving and maintaining equitable health outcomes for all, including for future generations

Sustainable health equity means achieving and maintaining equitable health outcomes for all people, including for future generations. It encompasses: 1) realizing the right to health so everyone can access a full range of health services regardless of their demographic characteristics; 2) addressing the underlying determinants of health, like clean water and a healthy environment, necessary for leading a healthy life; and 3) fulfilling a wide range of human rights, including economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights. Achieving sustainable health equity requires that public services be designed and provided and that public policies be developed, through empowering, inclusive, participatory, and accountable processes and mechanisms.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the extreme inequity in access to diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines, resulting in a per capita death toll 31% higher in low-income countries compared to high-income countries. The pandemic also revealed stark within-country inequities, both in access to COVID-19 vaccines and mortality rates due to COVID-19. In addition, the world is facing a syndemic of obesity, climate change, and undernutrition, with the worst outcomes experienced by populations in low- and middle-income countries, particularly those living in poverty and minoritized ethnic groups.

Sustainably attaining the highest possible level of health for all people everywhere requires addressing socioeconomic justice, including in the context of environmental sustainability. Nearly half the global population, 3.6 billion people, live in places highly vulnerable to the climate crisis, with deaths from floods, droughts, and storms 15 times higher compared to the least vulnerable regions.

Given that countries with the greatest GDP contribute the most to global fossil fuel emissions, those most responsible for the climate crisis need to cancel debt and compensate for loss and damage for the harm experienced by communities most impacted and least responsible for our planet's climate peril. Polluters—both at the corporate and the national level—must pay.

The Sustainable Health Equity Movement calls for health and environmental policies that are globally sustainable and decolonized to create conditions for all people and future generations to attain the highest attainable standard of health. In 1978, health leaders advocated for primary health care as the means to achieve the ambitious goal of health for all by 2000, but the debt crisis and subsequent global economic policies soon sidelined health equity, universal access, intersectoral action, and participatory approaches.

We urge governments to incorporate the right to health in all policies and practices—both domestically and in international agreements and policies and actions with extraterritorial impact—and to cut carbon emissions both at home and abroad, immediately.

