



Prescriptions for a Healthy Planet:

Acting on Sustainability and Human Health

**A National Think Tank meeting
The University of Sydney**

April 16, 2010





Prescriptions for a Healthy Planet:



Our mental, physical, social, economic and environmental problems are all linked and they are costing the earth, our sanity and our stability.

Surface temperatures in some parts of the world have risen alarmingly in the last decade. Increasing cyclonic intensity, rising sea levels, food insecurity, lack of water, forest degradation, heat stress, bush fires, flooding and droughts, along with proliferating superbugs and a resurgence of old infections are among the burgeoning health threats we face. But our greatest yet least recognised threats are mental ill health, social disruption, obesity and chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, cancers, and chronic lung disease.

Australia is one of the most urbanised and one of the 'fattest' countries on earth, and ranks high among the most depressed and suicidal. The way we eat is not only 'unsustainable' through ill health - the way we produce, transport and store food is degrading our soil, poisoning the atmosphere and changing our climate.

We generate more carbon emissions per capita than most and remain deep in our obsession with cars. In Australia we use eight hectares of land to feed each person, and waste a minimum of \$10million worth of food and products annually. Sixty years ago half a calorie of fossil fuel was needed to produce one calorie of food. Today 10 calories of fossil fuel is used to produce the same quantity. Australia's population is increasing by 1 million every 3 years, but arable

farming land is threatened by climate change, soil salinity and erosion, and urban sprawl. A doubling of resources consumed per capita in the last two decades has not produced noticeable increases in health or happiness.

The way we live and do business now is not sustainable

Climate change is arguably the biggest environmental threat that humanity faces. Related issues such as loss of biodiversity and resource depletion also present major challenges for health and environmental sustainability. For example, the WWF estimates that natural resources, such as water, soil, forest and fish stocks, are being consumed 1.4 times faster than they can be replenished. How will we feed the world's 9 billion population predicted by 2050? Or Australia's predicted population?

Optimal human health depends on a healthy environment, both natural and the 'built' environment, good governance, economic and political stability, and strong, resilient communities and societies. Currently, chronic diseases now account for over 60% of the world's deaths and are high among Australia's list of top killers. These diseases are inextricably linked to the way we live and do business – the way we manage our society.

We can do better





There are solutions if we choose them

The human race is resourceful. Our scientists are smart. Our business strategists are innovative. Our academics are thoughtful. There are solutions if we choose them. Input from representatives of diverse groups and organisations are essential to inform a truly comprehensive understanding of causes and responses to the contemporary challenges we face.

"Prescriptions for a Healthy Planet: Acting on Sustainability and Human Health" brings to the table national leaders from health and medicine, business and industry, planning and building, law, energy, agriculture, academia, government and non government sectors to debate the issues and highlight opportunities for a positive and balanced national response to health and climate change. Interactive sessions rather than dependence on traditional lecture format will allow optimal sharing of expertise and conflicting agendas.

This national 'think tank' on *sustainability and human health* will centre on strategies and policy options that rise above narrow economic considerations, that are implementable through individual and collective efforts to underpin mitigation and adaptation efforts in the face of climate change and associated challenges. It will be informed by the 2008 Sydney Resolution that arose

from the work of the Oxford Health Alliance (www.oxha.org) by building on four core topics:

- Reducing Poverty and Social Disadvantage
- Supportable Populations
- Responsible Business and Consumption
- Healthy Urbanisation

Input from representatives of diverse groups and organisations are essential to inform a truly comprehensive understanding of causes and responses to the contemporary challenges we face. This one day think tank aims to commence a process for identifying and acting on critical intervention points and policy options for specific short and long term responses to climate change and its impact on health at the personal, organisational and national level.

"Times of great upheaval are also times of great opportunity"

John Ralston Saul 2006



The Prescriptions for a Healthy Planet Think –Tank

is a joint initiative of



Doctors for the Environment Australia

DEA is a voluntary organisation and a branch of the International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE). DEA's activities range from education of our profession and the community on the relationship between human health and the environment to direct engagement with governments and industry, using expert scientific and medical opinion.

www.dea.org.au



University of Sydney Institute for Sustainable Solutions

USISS provides a focal point for sustainability research and new ways of thinking about and providing solutions. It reaches out to the broader community to tackle complex problems with innovative, multi-dimensional solutions across four key areas: health; energy; environment and development/productivity. www.usyd.edu.au/sustainable_solutions



Confronting the Epidemic
of Chronic Disease

Oxford Health Alliance

The Oxford Health Alliance is a non-profit, international think-and-action tank of diverse stakeholders, dedicated to confronting the epidemic of chronic disease through innovative action. It operates at a macro-economic and macro-political level to influence and accelerate changes aimed at making our physical, social and work environments more conducive to health. www.oxha.org

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