Human Health is intrinsically linked to the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. A healthy planet is essential for promoting human health. And yet, we face tremendous challenges in delivering a healthy planet for healthy people. The World Health Organization has estimated that nearly 13 million people die each year from environmentally-related health risks, including 7 million people each year from air pollution alone. In fact, 91 per cent of the world’s population breathes polluted air, 2.1 billion people lack safe drinking water, 2 billion people lack access to sanitation, and 2 billion people suffer some form of malnutrition.1,2

Planetary health is defined as “the health of human civilization and the state of the natural systems on which it depends.” - Rockefeller Foundation Economic Council on Planetary Health at the Oxford Martin School

Planetary health faces substantial challenges

1. 91% of the world’s population breathe polluted air
2. 2.1 million people lack access to safe drinking water
3. Waterborne diarrheal diseases cause 2 million deaths each year
4. Obesity affects 3 billion people, significantly increasing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and other diseases.

The opportunities for taking actions that have simultaneous co-benefits for the climate and health are significant, as are the socioeconomic advantages from greater health and productivity. Such actions include:

- Ramping up renewable energy systems such as wind and solar power to lower carbon dioxide emissions and reduce respiratory diseases associated with urban air pollution
- Expanding forests to increase their capacity to pull carbon dioxide from the atmosphere
- Transitioning the global food system to steward human health and environmental sustainability, through sustainable agricultural practices and government incentives that promote healthy diets
- Taking a health-centric approach to urban planning, including active and green mobility
- Changing lifestyles, e.g., eating less meat, riding bicycles and reducing air travel

Does it Pay?

The business case for taking an integrated approach to health, environment and climate change is supported by mounting evidence that companies that take an integrated approach to climate and the environment outperform their competitors across a range of vital key performance indicators (KPIs) including:

- Increased sales by as much as 20%
- Increased employee productivity by as much as 13%
- Decreased employee turnover by as much as 50%
- Cut operating costs by the billions

To operationalize the business case for climate, environment, and health, leaders and their direct reports must build the capability to translate the potential financial results into action plans. KPIs used to track financial performance should generate measureable progress. These KPIs should:

- Have a scientific basis. Science-based targets used for the climate crisis can serve as a useful framework. Metrics should assess the potential negative and positive impacts associated with the company’s operations, supply chains and organizational boundaries to serve people and the planet.
- Use health as a leading indicator of environmental progress. The social determinants of health drive well-being. Companies should be able to use progress in health metrics to help indicate progress on environmental impacts.
- Assess the business case. Metrics should identify how improved health and well-being support the company’s KPIs, such as share price, sales, productivity, employee retention, etc.

Business Leadership for Planetary Health

Corporate planetary health leaders exhibit competencies in working collaboratively across disciplines and functional silos and across organizational boundaries to serve people and the planet. Two attributes are particularly key to successful business leadership on planetary health:

1. Mastery of intent—i.e. the ability to intentionally design and implement solutions, such as programs, policies and products, which tackle global problems at the intersection of health, sustainability and the environment, thereby achieving more than the sums of both parts.
2. Mastery of integration—i.e. the ability to design a corporate strategy that aligns teams, policies, and targets around these integrated solutions.

Business must take ambitious actions that have measurable health and environmental co-benefits, and offer long-term strategic advantage to the organization and all of its stakeholders, in order to be a leader in planetary health. The figure below demonstrates different stages of health and environmental strategic integration within companies. We challenge companies to reach quadrant D in the figure below.
Based on the guidance from the UN Global Compact’s Blueprint for Business Leadership on the SDGs, we challenge companies to meet the five leadership qualities of integrated health, environment and climate actions presented below:

**Intentional**  Integration of health and environmental initiatives is an intentional, core component of the company’s strategy.

**Ambitious**  Integrated action delivers multiple co-benefits for health and the environment, exceeding that of the outcomes of stand-alone practices.

**Consistent**  All organizational functions are aligned on the delivering positive outcomes for Goal 3 as a measurable sustainable development output.

**Collaborative**  Health and environmental integration initiatives embrace partnerships with businesses, government, and civil society.

**Accountable**  Outcomes of integrated health and environmental initiatives are measurable, accountable, and transparent, while minimizing risk and engaging meaningfully with stakeholders.

**Pursuing Business Impact on Planetary Health**

To deliver actions based upon the leadership attributes outlined above, companies should follow the process outlined here:

1. **Map areas of environment, climate, and health co-benefits.** Prioritize where co-benefits can be reached across raw materials, suppliers, inbound logistics, operations, distribution, product use, and product end life.

2. **Assess how to take action.** Use logic models (below) to define how your company can provide health and environmental co-benefits.

3. **Gather baseline data and select indicators.** Determine indicators that can be used to monitor progress for each step of the logic model. When developing new indicators it is essential that they be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Sets of four indicators — a state indicator, an environmental determinant indicator, a health effect indicator and an action indicator — can help a company monitor its impacts and improvements in an integrated way. Upon determining the most effective indicators and data collection methods, the company must gather baseline data to understand the current state and for use in setting targets.

4. **Set Targets.** Set targets based on the ambitious and necessary levels of action determined by scientific assessments. These are considered “science-based targets.” The field of evidence necessary to take these ambitious actions is growing. For example, companies can be approved by the Science Based Targets Initiative to follow a 1.5°C carbon emissions reduction plan for 2050.

**Take Home Messages**

The headlines that are below emphasize important considerations for companies who are ready to take ambitious action for the health of people and planet.

“Climate change may cause significant health costs to your company”  Health effects due to climate change will impact all industries by reducing workplace health and productivity.

“Health is a leading indicator for climate and environmental action”  Health risks are a large piece of environmental and climate impacts. It is essential that health outcomes be used as a key indicator for environmental and climate action. By using health as a leading indicator of progress for environmental and climate action, companies may uncover cost savings and risk reductions that would otherwise go unseen and find the business case for action much more compelling.

“The potential for real transformational change comes through collaboration”  Given the shared nature of the planetary health challenges, and the complexity of the underlying economic drivers, policy instruments, market forces and supply chains in which they exist, businesses need to come together to take joint action.

“Individual action is not enough: companies must take a policy stance”  Participating in public policy on planetary health issues involves identifying your company’s risk, influences and areas of opportunity in this area. It also involves aligning company communications and policies across all departments and with associated trade groups. Lastly, it involves making the company’s climate policy stance public and influencing policy makers to create ‘ambition loops’ for change – i.e. the positive feedback loops in which private sector leadership and Government policies reinforce each other.

**For more information**

Download the complete report here  [https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/5714](https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/5714)

Learn about the Health is Everyone’s Business Action Platform here  [https://www.unglobalcompact.org/take-action/action-platforms/health](https://www.unglobalcompact.org/take-action/action-platforms/health)

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