

A manifesto for global sustainable health

Sustainable Health Symposium
Cambridge, UK
25th July 2017



Introduction

Across the globe, the health of individuals, their communities and the planet is in crisis as key drivers including rising inequity, food insecurity, the burden of chronic diseases, environmental pollution and climate change continue unabated. World health is inextricably linked to global development, and solutions to the challenges we face require seeing the interconnections of these world views through the lens of sustainability.

Access to healthcare is subjected to increasing stresses from global economics because of rising costs and demand, as well as challenges associated with health disparity and inequality. This crisis offers us the opportunity to rethink our understanding of health and healthcare delivery.

This manifesto attempts to summarize the Sustainable Health Symposium that was held in Cambridge in July, 2017.

The symposium included conversations on the transformative shift from sickness to wellness, from products to services, towards innovative and frugal technological solutions that support people, communities, the planet, and a new health operating system.

What we have learned is that we need to better listen to communities, embrace shared power and decision making, and learn how to truly listen to voices and needs of individuals and their communities.

One document cannot do justice to the richness and diversity of discussions, and we hope this is the start of a much longer and deeper conversation that can mobilize action. Clearly, wisdom from across the globe must be continually harvested to facilitate the transformations required for a healthy, sustainable world.



What is sustainable health?

Human systems, including our current medical system, have had a significant and damaging impact on our natural world. Indeed many of these impacts have pushed the environment beyond planetary limits which requires a radical approach to how society is structured.

Additionally over the past few decades society has been more unequal leading to further global challenges. To develop transformative responses our focus should be on the creation of a healthy, just society, which is truly our health system.

There is no one definition of sustainable health. Indeed, the flexibility to define the goals of sustainable health to match the particular outcome and intervention required is important. Setting goals can radically change the interventions chosen.

What we heard is that the definition of sustainable health is dynamic. However, themes that are always important include physical, mental, spiritual and emotional wellbeing; equity; access; compassion; agency, or the ability to effect change; as well as the need for the institution of healthcare to demonstrate financial viability and resource efficiency.

While these issues operate at a local level it and each community will face different health challenges the need to transform to a sustainable health perspective is a global issue. Global health is a complex system of systems. We need to be aware of the interconnectedness within the system when trying to design solutions, interventions and policy. By better understanding these interconnections we be more transparent about the benefits from the current systems. This in turn allows us to better understand the motivations behind current practice.

Global health is, fundamentally, global sustainable development. Engineering has as much to offer to sustainable health as does medicine. We need to improve our ability to use evidence and research to inform decisions, as well as empower all actors, whether they are well funded pharmaceutical multinationals or community health practitioners on the ground in a post disaster area, to have a voice in shaping this new health care.

By changing our definition of health, and moving away from illness management, our concept of health care should also change.

As a global society we systematically undervalue health, and overvalue illness. Sustainable health needs to empower.



A route map for change

The Symposium structure was developed to support the emergence of the collective wisdom of the many participants. Using participatory grounded processes, attendees engaged in the exploration of key questions designed to support the emergence of strategies and concepts for what is truly needed to deliver health transformation. These ideas were recorded and collected and have been summarized below into recurrent themes. It is important to appreciate their inter-relationship and non-hierarchical nature.

While these themes emerged from this initial set of discussions they do not represent an end point but are put forward to help develop and design a key set of questions that need to be investigated in the journey towards sustainable health.

Place, Sense of Place, Decentralized Decision Making

While comments varied, the concept of place, people, and context was consistently present. They included suggestions such as “listen to local communities”, “empower local leaders” and “support local change agents”. The concept of health should encapsulate the health of local communities and the local environment. Indeed we are all members of a local community. How do we find out what communities and individuals want and need, so they can shape and therefore trust the system? We should “avoid paternalism and understand ownership of change”. Ultimately health is influenced by the choice architecture in a particular locality.

Individual, community and planetary health

Health is holistic, encompassing the natural environment, community and individual health. Individual health and community health are one and the same. We must consider equity, the concept that a community is only as healthy as its individuals. We must take a societal, community approach and recognize that health is not simply an individual responsibility but everyone's responsibility. We also need to recognize, and manage, the health system's impact on our natural environment. We must link systems thinking at the individual, community, and planetary level. Our governance approaches to health care design needs to be more open at the earliest possible stages.

New Holistic Model

Health is a dynamic function of our mind, body, spirit and emotions, much different from how our current bio-medical approach considers health. Health creation is not about the absence of disease but more about quality of life and, importantly, agency - the ability to affect change. We have to move from a “fixing it” healthcare model focused on consuming medicines towards social prescribing and a cultural narrative of happiness and creativity. Health inequities are the major marker of health injustice and the “global” in global health is not about geography, social or physical but about the scope and the responsibility.

New Thinking, New Process, New Language

“Are we getting in the way of ourselves?” New people bring new ideas and unlock strategies. They may use different words but their input is valuable. Often experts and health leaders, or sustainability leaders, may form a barrier to their engagement through pre-existing power structures whether formal and recognized or not. How can we find courage and to give up power when this is required? We need to listen to the expertise of individuals more and understand that different perspectives improve solutions. “Increased conversations and networks break down barriers” and we need “more transparency and sharing”.

Need New Skills Training

The understanding that health is a dynamic model opened up an awareness that different skills and approaches are needed. Training on new ways of working with people, multidisciplinary approaches to education and research, systems thinking, new governance approaches, planetary health, communication and engagement tools as well as skills for new and emergent disease management are vital. We need broader training beyond the medical school. Health as an outcome needs to be recognized in the training of all those whose work results in better health, this will include teachers, engineers, town planners, architects, business professionals...

A social movement

Working in the world of transformation

During the symposium energy and positivity were evident despite the complexity of the challenge that we face. The importance of, and difficulty of, cross discipline and cross sector engagement is noted. However, we also note the call to be willing to be curious, open and to have the confidence to take action that makes a difference. As a network we will support each other to test and probe ideas, work iteratively and be open to failure.

To take forward this manifesto we encourage everyone who took part in the symposium, and our wider stakeholders, to contribute ideas, plans and processes to our thinking. No one organisation can lead this – everyone needs to play their part across the various horizons to bring learning together.

This, our first manifesto, attempts to be inclusive, aspirational and solutions orientated.

As organizations we will:

- explore the creation of a virtual global hub, or network of hubs to share best practice and support a community or learning and practice
- explore the creation of a network of individuals who can create or support change with an online platform
- explore the creation of a body of collaborators who can respond to funding calls and mentor others.
- support and encourage similar multistakeholder conversations and symposia across the globe
- recognize the value of collaboration and diversity of perspectives.

As individuals we will:

- support grass route and cross sector initiatives that support the route map for change of this manifesto
- share this manifesto as widely as possible.



Steering committee organisations



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