

DISCUSSION PAPER

Planetary health: what we need to talk about



The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how vulnerable we are and how closely connected we are with Nature. Health cannot be taken for granted. Do we take the prerequisites for healthy living seriously enough? Or are we, as a civilization, systematically jeopardizing our health?

Healthy people as part of a healthy planet Earth

In recent decades, as prosperity has increased, human health has improved worldwide, yet not everyone has benefited. In poorer population groups, infectious diseases and maternal and child mortality still cause a great deal of avoidable suffering. Increasingly, however, the gains in longevity are threatened by a negative impact on health, on the one hand as 'too much of a good thing' through the over-consumption of food and the displacement of physical activity from everyday life, on the other as harmful side effects, in the form of air pollution and environmental toxins. As a result, lifestyle diseases such as overweight, diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases are on the rise worldwide. Last but not least, our insatiable resource use of 90, with its immense emissions of greenhouse gases, the destruction of natural habitats and increasing pollution of land and sea, has led

to a planetary crisis, it threatens the natural life support systems on Earth and thus the health of all people. Heat waves, droughts, floods and pandemics threaten to do so that our society is dependent on functioning ecosystems and a stable biosphere. The growing risk could furthermore threaten the cohesion of our societies and our broader healthcare systems. But the crisis also gives us an opportunity to rethink our idea of prosperity and progress, to break habits and make our societies fairer, more sustainable and healthier. Because the increasing environmental and health problems often have common roots, strategies can be found in approaches to act together. We are all interconnected. Society, business and politics must assume responsibility and initiate a comprehensive transformation that leads to healthy human life on a healthy planet.

The WBGU is currently working on the interconnections between health and global environmental change and would like to put forward three assertions and ten sets of questions for discussion.

- 1 Our lifestyle is making us ill and is destroying the planet.
- 2 Healthy people can only exist on a healthy planet.
- 3 We must initiate a civilizational transformation for planetary health.



Berlin, 18th of November 2021. Today the WBGU publishes its new [discussion paper](#) "Planetary Health: What we need to talk about". The aim of this four-pager is to stimulate a discussion on the role of health in the global transformation towards sustainability.

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seriously enough? Or are we, as a civilization, systematically jeopardizing our health? You are welcome to discuss the topic on [Twitter](#).

On 14 December 2021, the paper will be discussed in a webinar. A public face-to-face event is planned for 16 February 2022 in Berlin (in German language). The insights and suggestions gained from this dialogue process will be taken into account in our work on the new flagship report currently being prepared, which is expected to be published in the first half of 2023.