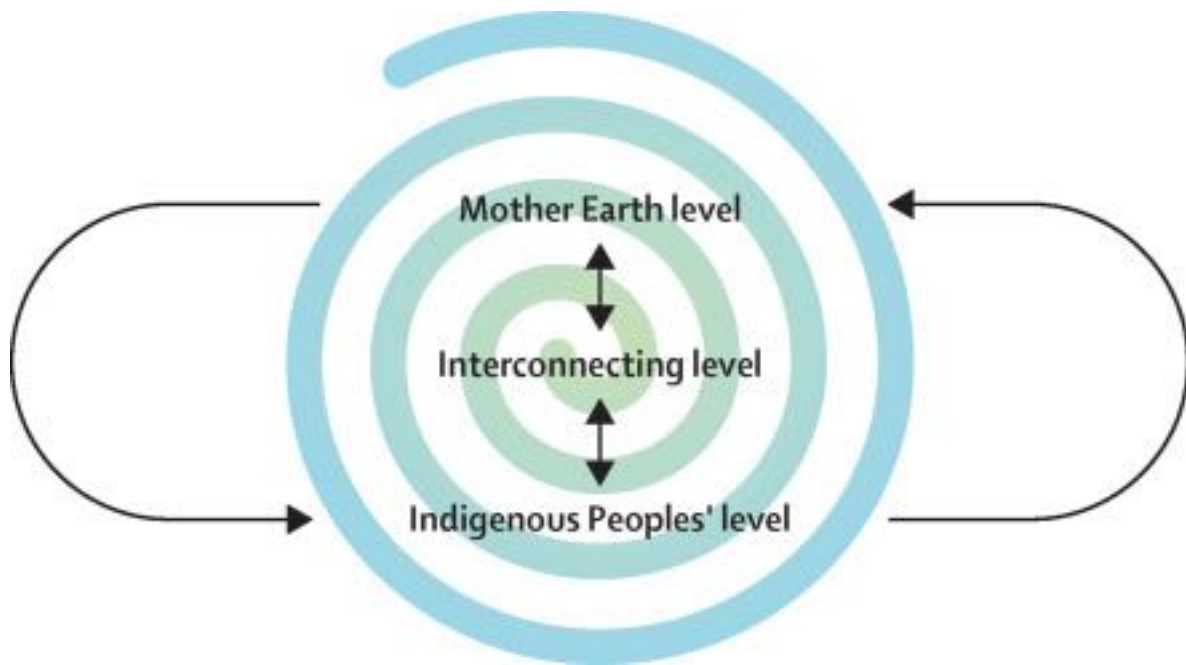


The Determinants of Planetary Health Identified by the Indigenous Consensus Process



Indigenous Peoples have resiliently weathered continued assaults on their sovereignty and rights throughout colonialism and its continuing effects. Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty has been strained by the increasing effects of global environmental change within their territories, including climate change and pollution, and by threats and impositions against their land and water rights. This continuing strain against sovereignty has prompted a call to action to conceptualize the determinants of planetary health from a perspective that embodied Indigenous-specific methods of knowledge gathering from around the globe. A group of Indigenous scholars, practitioners, land and water defenders, respected Elders, and knowledge-holders came together to define the determinants of planetary health from an Indigenous perspective. Three overarching levels of interconnected determinants, in addition to ten individual-level determinants, were identified as being integral to the health and sustainability of the planet, Mother Earth.

Mother Earth-level determinants

Respect of the feminine

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Ancestral legal personhood designation

Interconnecting determinants

Human interconnectedness within Nature

-

Self and community relationships

-

The modern scientific paradigm

-

Governance and law

Indigenous Peoples' level determinants

Indigenous land tenure rights

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Indigenous languages

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Indigenous Peoples' health

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Indigenous Elders and children

Mother Earth-Level Determinants

Respect of the Feminine

- Indigenous worldviews often recognize Mother Earth's creative power as the “primordial” First Mother.
- Women are vessels for strong communities and networks.
- Women foster community, strengthen resilience, and enhance collective vitality and wellbeing.
- Women are keepers of cultural identity and are caretakers of the natural environment.
- Gender-oppressive systems do not recognize the feminine regenerative power necessary to keep our planet healthy. -
- Violence against Mother Earth is violence against women, and vice versa.

Ancestral Legal Personhood Designation

- Indigenous Peoples globally have the sacred mandate and right to give voice to rivers and to all of Nature.
- This right is often not respected by common law; however, Indigenous Peoples continue to stand up to protect their human and non-human relatives.
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- Indigenous leadership in the rights of Nature movements have led to global interest in examining and promoting models of Indigenous-led governance that draws on Indigenous-rooted law and practice as a source of legitimacy and authority.
- Approaches that extend legal pluralism while illuminating the interconnectedness in Nature have recently been exemplified.
- Mother Earth, critical habitat and rivers have been a source of ideas and inspiration for ancestral personhood in coexistence with earth laws, setting the stage for the extension of legal pluralism to ancestral beings.

- Outside of these important examples, current political and economic narratives continue to deprive the land, water, and air of being in the world as equal rights-holders.
- This denial of the right of being is a direct product of ongoing capitalist and colonial mandates, which will continue to exacerbate the environmental crisis.
- The denial of being is a deficit discourse that perpetuates negativity, deficiency, and the disempowerment of Nature through current legal statutes.
- Indigenous Peoples share here ancestral legal personhood as a decolonized counter-narrative worthy of voice, protection, and identity.

Interconnecting Determinants

Human interconnectedness within Nature

- One of the pre-eminent causes of the planet's destruction is the collective loss of awareness of the interconnectedness that exists within Nature.
- Ecological demise points to an impaired human relationship with its inner self (ie, humans are Nature and not apart from it).
- An ideology of independence has resulted in a sense of entitled ownership,
- Utilitarian perception of the natural world
- Relates to it through transactional relationships that do not have a sense of responsibility, care, or love. This worldview will only continue to perpetuate planetary harm.
- Even our conceptualization of time has been influenced by a system that disconnects people from Nature.
- Nature-oriented calendars (solar or lunar), which integrated ecological awareness through synchronicity with the planet's natural cycles.

- With colonisation came western-based perceptions of time and a consequent disconnect with the sources of life—water, air, earth, and sunlight.
- People have lost their way as a human species as they have forgotten that they are Nature.
- Regaining this relationship with ourselves and Mother Earth is crucial for the wellbeing of our planetary home.

Self and community relationships

- Indigenous Nations are predominantly collective by nature. Individuals in collective-based societies learn from a very young age that interdependence with others and place (ie, Land or Country) helps to maintain wellness and balance.
- Collective societies are more likely to consider the present and future impact their thoughts and actions have on others and place rather than focus on immediate self-gratification or reward (ie, life about service vs life about gain).
- This collective focus contrasts with that of individualist societies that many Indigenous Peoples are continually forced to exist in, which results in interruption to their teachings and practice of culture in addition to a confusion of identity.
- When a sense of reverence for ourselves and our community is lost, so is our sense of belonging.
- Mother Earth has the potential to heal and restore when people reclaim their collective identities and relationships while building innate community strengths.

The modern scientific paradigm

- Western science is a paradigm that uses the scientific method to theorize, hypothesize, find variables, measure, and describe a relationship, usually in mathematical, economic, or even political terms.

- However, the paradigm is limited in explaining complex relationships over time (ie, longitudinal), and can be described as linear, reductionistic, and mechanistic.
- The overarching interest of western science is to infer phenomena to understand the world; however, there is an underlying implicit interest to find ways to influence, control, and perhaps eventually modify these phenomena for human benefit.
- The pendulum in the 21st century is swinging towards the need for a systems-oriented, ecological-based, networking approach.
- It has become apparent that society “cannot solve complex problems from the same worldview that created them in the first place, as it will continue to perpetuate a disconnect between us and the planet as ‘relatives’”
- This approach might seem more aligned to the complexity of planetary health and other complex systems with which people inter-relate.

Governance and Law

- Governance and law reflect our explicit or implicit agreements on lifestyles and worldviews.
- Governance and legal mechanisms are translated into norms and codes that aim to then define our interaction with Mother Earth, an interaction most often premised on development.
- However, many development measures and indicators are not sustainable. These unsustainable measures and indicators (eg, gross domestic product) are achieved at the expense of Mother Earth's health through a lifestyle of consumption that encourages waste and dismisses relationship.
- Alternatively, Indigenous Peoples have Natural or First Law that governs lives and embodies complex notions of reciprocity and responsibility.
- Natural or First Law represents “a comprehensive ethical framework that defines the codes of conduct necessary for maintaining a peaceful, thriving, and co-operative society grounded in love and reciprocity”
- The governance practices and embodiment of Natural or First Law by Indigenous Peoples relates directly to the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- Maintaining Indigenous governance and Natural or First Law through negotiated instruments—combined with Indigenous Peoples’ self-determination—is foundational to the health of the planet as it will continue to prioritise the rights of all our relatives as well as Mother Earth.

Indigenous Peoples’ Level Determinants

Indigenous Land Tenure Rights

- 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity is currently stewarded by Indigenous Peoples.
- Yet, Indigenous Peoples inhabit only 22% of the Earth's surface. Indigenous Peoples manage or have tenure rights to a little more than a quarter of the world's surface in 87 countries or politically distinct areas on all inhabited continents.
- It is increasingly being appreciated that recognizing Indigenous Peoples’ “rights to land, benefit sharing and institutions is important to meeting local and global conservation goals”
- The essential roles of Indigenous Peoples are recognized in the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol, a demonstration of the need for their essential leadership within conservation and sustainability spaces.
- However, Indigenous land tenure rights are under continued threat from governments, multinational corporations, and other interests, with violence against Indigenous environmental activists being strongly related to economic activities with high environmental impacts.
- Indigenous land tenure rights guarantees ownership or control of lands and resources, which ensures protection and conservation of the planet's ecosystems.
- It is integral that more awareness, amplification, and actioned support for Indigenous land tenure rights occurs to better ensure a healthy planet for all.

Indigenous Languages

- Of the world's approximately 6700 languages, Indigenous Peoples speak more than 4000 of them, despite making up only 5% of the world's population.
- It is estimated that one Indigenous language dies every 2 weeks due to colonizing and structural influences.
- With each loss, an extensive and complex system of ecological knowledge developed over millennia is also lost.
- This loss matters for planetary health as there is an established recognition of a direct and essential link between Indigenous language preservation and traditional knowledges related to biodiversity preservation.
- In fact, Indigenous language preservation might be crucial for curbing the loss of biodiversity. Language matters not only for its ecological ties but also in how people frame relationships and for the energies it embodies and carries forward when people speak.
- Many of the names of Indigenous Peoples come directly from the Land itself (eg, for the Dene Peoples of northern Canada, De means flow, ne means land; the Dene's very being therefore flows from the land).
- Nature needs a new pronoun in western cultures to re-establish Mother Earth's place as our relative.

Indigenous Peoples' Health

- The health of the planet is intrinsically tied to the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples.
- When Indigenous Peoples have their Land, culture, and sovereignty, they are more likely to have greater wellbeing.
- Natural or First Law provides frameworks for understanding relationships to place; therefore, it lays the foundations for the fulfilment of Indigenous Peoples' ecological and relational responsibilities.
- However, due to ongoing processes of colonisation, many Indigenous Peoples struggle with cultural disconnection, dispossession of land rights, and actioning self-determination.

- These processes impact on Indigenous Peoples' health and wellbeing and, therefore, on their abilities to care for Mother Earth.
- It is imperative that Indigenous Peoples' health is approached from a holistic lens that acknowledges cultural and Land-based practices as being crucial for human health and for the health of the planet.

Indigenous Elders and children

- Indigenous homes are intergenerational households that extend beyond the physical and social environments in which a person lives.
- "Home can be conceived as the relationships that connect a person to all that surrounds them including people, plants, animals, insects, and land as well as ancestors, stories, languages, songs, and traditions.
- "Indigenous Elders are considered to be the foundation of the home and the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of the community.
- They are the sacred keepers of traditional knowledges and culture, safeguarding Indigenous identity, family bonds, and connectedness.
- Indigenous Elders are the teachers who transmit traditional values and a relational and ecologically rooted philosophy and worldview through stories, experiential learning, and ceremonies.

At the core of their wisdom is how to live in harmony with Mother Earth and all of her beings.

Indigenous Elders hold the intergenerational lineage connected to the future of the planet through younger generations.

Elders and children are at the heart of cultural revitalization and sustainability.

Elders guide children on social values, roles, traditions, and ideologies, teaching these narratives to support place, purpose, and social responsibility in the world.

Children themselves carry ecological roles as they learn how to nourish relations and take care of the Land through interactions with the environment, their peers, parents, and Elders. Ensuring this intergenerational household is supported and maintained is crucial for everyone on the planet.

Steps towards rightful stewardship and balanced relationships

The determinants of planetary health are deeply interconnected. For example, Indigenous Elders cannot pass down traditional ecological knowledge to children if they do not have access to their Lands from which to teach.

The planet will benefit when the western scientific paradigm openly and actively respects other knowledge systems, and when government policies and laws reflect an Earth-centred worldview. (see the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,³² which provides a roadmap to advance the reconciliation work needed in this space)

“Indigenous people are very scientific—it's just that our science includes the heart. When Mother Earth becomes our heart, she will be safe, as we cannot live without our heart.”

Indigenous Peoples offer important lessons through cultivating an intentional, inclusive, and interactive perspective based on observation and relationship with the Land.

Indigenous “Ways of Life” combines these concepts of relationship and interconnectedness between different beings and how we, as Indigenous Peoples and nature, exist and thrive

All peoples need to acknowledge, understand, and implement the Ways of Life, and come to appreciate that our “collective networks are ecological networks” that involve the planet as a whole.

Conclusion

It was essential to conceptualize the determinants of planetary health from an Indigenous perspective with Indigenous-specific methods of knowledge sharing from around the globe.

Many of the determinants identified through this consensus process were felt to be already appreciated in many Indigenous communities and integral to the long-term sustainability and health of Mother Earth.

The group looks forward to more clearly examining the implementation and practical application of these determinants of planetary health from an Indigenous lens involving larger networks of communities.

It became clear that Mother Earth is dependent on the human capacity to understand interconnectedness as a basic and fundamental reality.

Universal interconnectedness is a transformational relational process of understanding that can stimulate psychological integration and a sense of responsibility to the larger world.

An awakened sense of interdependence between people and planet can be achieved through a gradual process of awareness and action that depends on the inherent human potential for relationality—we are all in and of Nature.

Human beings must adapt an all-inclusive consideration for Mother Earth as our relative in all spheres of influence.

As equitable and inclusive societies, institutions, and fields are built, embracing diverse knowledges will get us closer to a well and just planet for all.

Indigenous voices are a powerful and beneficial solutions-orientated force for Mother Earth's wellbeing and for all living beings that inhabit her.

We therefore call for an inclusion of wisdom that is not mere knowledge or information but is an insight that comes from the heart—from the heart of Mother Earth.