

**WELCOME TO  
IRISH DOCTORS  
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**



# IRISH DOCTORS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

## WELCOME PACKAGE



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## INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE

From our COO Rachel MacCann

Hello and welcome to Irish Doctors for the Environment! We are a group of medical doctors and students from all specialities of medicine: GPs, physicians, anaesthetists, psychiatrists, paediatricians, surgeons, public health specialists, academics, medical students and researchers. We believe that good health is inextricably linked to healthy, stable environments. Our mission is to protect health through care of the environment.

I have been a member of IDE since its early formation in 2018 and I have watched it grow and connect doctors with like-minded organizations, policy makers and communities. By educating clinicians on the impact of climate change and health, we can advocate for change in the Irish health system. IDE aims to be at the centre of the emerging field of planetary health in Ireland. By joining IDE, you'll become part of our growing community and we encourage you to get involved, get active, and get heard!



# OUR VISION

## Healthy Planet, Healthy Life

Irish Doctors for Environment is a branch of **doctors in Ireland who aim to create awareness, interest and implement action around environment health** and the impact it has on our patients' health.

We work alongside various NGOs, environmentalists, the government, scientists and other organisations both nationally and internationally to ensure full co-operation and education regarding the global issues of climate change which affect local, national and international health.

We strive to support initiatives from local community level to policy change and implementation at a national and international level.



*“The whole of life is coming to terms with yourself and the natural world. Why are you here? How do you fit in? What’s it all about?”*

— Sir David  
Attenborough

# WHAT WE DO

**Change** → IDE is committed to being an agent for change

- Working with medical conferences to improve sustainability and reduce their environmental impact
- Green committee network: IDE is working on a network of green committees in Irish hospitals to facilitate projects lasting longer than the rotations of members passing through
- Submissions to government: IDE writes policy submissions to the HSE and other bodies involved in Irish healthcare to help improve sustainability in Ireland such as the 2020 smokey coal ban and current efforts to reevaluate the Irish Dietary Guidelines



**Advocacy** → IDE is committed to use our position of privilege to speak out on issues related to health and the environment

- IDE lends its voice to local initiatives such as the Cork City Cycling Lane Campaign
- IDE is involved in Direct Action, such as having a stand at Extinction Rebellion week and marching with the Climate school strikers
- Addressed the Oireachtas Committee for Environment on the importance of prioritising active transport over electric cars

**Science** → IDE aims to be involved in the promotion of planetary health science in Ireland

- Publishing papers and opinion pieces in journals, including BMJ and Medical Teacher
- Speaking at academic conferences
- Hosted academic events such as the Lancet Countdown Ireland and IGHN forum
- Inclusion of climate change in the medical curriculum group: IDE is involved in conversations with many medical schools on including climate impact in undergraduate curriculum



**Education** → IDE is committed to educating doctors and the public on the climate crisis and its health effects. We aim to be a conduit through which those interested can learn more about the issues facing us and how healthcare and climate interact

- Promoting climate actions and engaging with the wider community via social media, monthly newsletter, and blog
- The Climate Conversations with IDE podcast
- Hosting talks and conferences involving interesting and relevant thinkers, such as John Gibbons, the Irish environmental campaigner
- Grand rounds talks
- Produced a guide to prescribing inhalers to reduce their air pollution







# WORKING GROUPS

IDE's aims and vision are broad and our group consists of a wide range of specialities & expertise within the medical field. We work within smaller working groups to share resources and achieve goals on various issues affecting environment and health within Ireland.

## Medical Education Working Group

The Curriculum Working Group is a group of medical students, doctors, and consultants who are working towards the introduction of planetary health and climate change into the medical curriculum in Ireland. The group remains largely student-led with representatives from five out of six medical schools in Ireland. The group recently took part in the Planetary Health Report Card Initiative, an international student-driven, metric-based initiative to inspire planetary health and sustainable healthcare education engagement in medical schools. Additionally, the group has organized workshops and other events, such as one at the European Health Conference in 2021 and is responsible for articles published in *Medical Teacher* and *Policy and Practice*. In the future, the group plans to meet with the Irish Medical Council and postgraduate training bodies to discuss how they can incorporate planetary health into their curricula and training programmes.

## Primary Care Sustainability

The primary care sustainability working group works to assist healthcare businesses in the community with developing a green toolkit to empower individuals to raise awareness and practical goals towards sustainable healthcare teams. They aim to get colleagues in IDE to estimate the carbon footprint of Irish Healthcare, and aim to campaign, educate & empower primary care professionals to move to sustainable options. They have published articles about planetary health in *Forum*, the journal for the ICGP.

## Air Quality

One of our most active groups, the Air Quality working group aims to inform public conversation and raise awareness around the role of air quality in respiratory and other diseases. The group has recently published a pocket book guide to sustainable inhaler prescribing, specifically aimed at reducing the use of MDIs, which have a carbon footprint 10–30 times greater than alternatives. They have also worked to get local air quality and an awareness video displayed on hospital monitors, which was an award-winning project.



## Direct Action

The Direct Action working group feels strongly about the need to bring the severity of the climate emergency to the forefront of public discourse. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is by supporting and participating in public protests, events and directly lobbying in the media and government action. Over 50 IDE members joined the largest Fridays for Future School strike, members have attended many Extinction Rebellion events and have written letters that have been published in national media including The Irish Times.



## Anaesthetic Gases

The Anaesthetic working group primary aim is to make anaesthesia more sustainable. They aim to create a network for environmental enthusiasts in anaesthesia and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions among anaesthesiologists through safe use of low flow anaesthesia, TIVA, and sparing use of N<sub>2</sub>O and Desflurane. Currently the group is working closely with the College of Anaesthesiologists of Ireland to promote sustainable anaesthesia practices.



## Sustainable Diets

Our current dietary habits in Ireland are a major contributory factor to the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases, however, Irish agriculture is also the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the country. The sustainable diets working group aims to promote the consumption and procurement of sustainable, healthy foods in Irish health care facilities, which is rich in whole food fruits, vegetables, and plants, and can benefit both our health and our planet. We are also pushing for the development of new Irish Healthy Eating Guidelines which incorporate healthy, sustainable diets, as sustainability should be a primary consideration in the Irish Healthy Eating Guidelines if we wish to improve human health and reduce our climate impact. The group has also been promoting a reduction in food waste and published a plant-based recipe booklet as a healthy resource for patients.

## Sustainable Healthcare

The Sustainable Healthcare working group endeavours to reduce carbon emissions and plastics' use in healthcare. We have worked on various sustainability and recycling projects, on energy use reducing projects, and planting trees on hospital campuses. We have been working on uniting all the Green Groups in Irish hospitals to create a national Green Hospital. These Green Groups aim to improve the sustainability of their hospitals through big and small actions, from reducing the use of nitrous oxide to replacing old lights with LEDs.



## Research and Planetary Health Science

Coordinates and provides support for all things academic: research, presentations and conferences! IDE members have authored research in the field of planetary health that have been published in top journals, such as the BMJ and Medical Teacher, and aim to encourage the participation and collaboration of members in diverse research projects. Members have also given presentations and held workshops at numerous conferences. The working group is here to support anyone who has an opportunity to speak, be in hospital Grand Rounds or a conference.

## Active Transport

The Active Transport working group promotes the benefits of active transport from both health and environment perspective and aims to inform the public conversation with evidence based recommendations for how Irish towns and cities can improve and encourage active transport.

## Mental Health and Climate

The Climate and Mental Health group is one of our newest groups and had its inaugural meeting in April 2021. The group is aiming to examine the interplay between climate change and mental health, as well as examine how healthcare professionals in the field can contribute to improving our impacts on climate. Membership includes GPs, psychiatrists, researchers and others.



# 10 ACTIONS CLINICIANS CAN TAKE

## 1) Prudent Prescription

- Reduces polypharmacy
- Low-carbon alternatives (such as dry powder inhalers over metered-dose inhalers)
- Social prescribing

## 2) Responsible Referrals

- Reduce unnecessary investigation and referrals when appropriate

## 3) Connecting Communities

- Support the access and use of green spaces, community gardens and farms, outdoor gyms and community sporting activities

## 4) Identifying Inequalities

- Address inequalities, such as fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency in homes

## 5) Empowering Patients

- Person-centered care
- Empower patients to self-manage
- Tele-health







## 6) Role-Modelling

- Health professionals are trusted to send clear public health messages

## 7) Reproductive Health

- Ensure universal access to contraception and maternal healthcare

## 8) Connection & Engagement to Nature

- Benefits for physical and mental health
- Increase a sense of stewardship for the environment

## 9) Reducing Personal Environmental Impact

These steps can include:

- Recycling
- Energy Audits
- Composting
- Reducing air and car travel
- Driving smaller and more energy-efficient cars
- Using public and active transport

## 10) Get Involved!

- Join us at our monthly meetings and discuss with other clinicians about what we can do for planetary and human health!

# ONGOING PROJECTS

IDE meets **the first Wednesday of every month** to discuss current projects, as well as a monthly newsletter with updates on current events.

Some current ongoing projects in 2022-2023 include:

- Developing a report card for anaesthesia departments in hospitals across Ireland
- Development of policies within the HSE for climate change, sustainability and climate change adaptation
- Development of a sustainable recipe booklet

# AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS

IDE is proud to work with a number of local, national and international organizations who strive towards improving the environment for our future.

## **The Planetary Health Alliance**

<https://planetaryhealthalliance.org/mission>

## **Irish Forum of Global Health**

<https://globalhealth.ie/>

## **Healthcare Without Harm**

<https://noharm-europe.org/>

## **Clinicians for Planetary Health**

<https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/>

## **World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) Working Party on the Environment**

<https://www.globalfamilydoctor.com/groups/workingparties/environment.aspx>

## **Association of Public Health Registrars of Ireland (APHRI)**

<http://euronetmrph.org/residency-ireland/>

## **Stop Climate Chaos (SCC)**

<https://www.stopclimatechaos.ie>

## **Plant Based Doctors Ireland**

<https://www.plantbaseddoctorsireland.org>

## **Association of Medical Students Ireland (AMSI)**

<https://www.amsiofficial.com>

# THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A HEALTH CRISIS

## PLANETARY HEALTH

IDE believes in working to preserve and protect the health of our environmental systems while also recognizing the impact of global environmental changes has on our patients health.

Planetary health presents a new way to think of **“the health of human civilization and the state of the natural systems on which it depends”** as described in the Rockefeller Lancet report. Human reliance on earth’s resources for development and health has cost the planet more than it can gain. Natural systems today are being drained faster than they can replenish, which is impacting the health of our planet and its ability to sustain all life. According to the Rockefeller Lancet report, In order to protect the health of the planet and achieve planetary health, humans need to work with global governments in order to create policies around the sustainability and health of the planet.

### Resources

**The 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: shaping the health of nations for centuries to come:**

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)32594-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)32594-7/fulltext)

**Tracking the connections between public health and climate change:** <https://www.lancetcountdown.org/>

**Safeguarding human health in the Anthropocene epoch: report of The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health:**

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60901-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60901-1/fulltext)





**For more information on how to get  
involved, visit us at**

<https://www.ide.ie/>



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