



# A New Vision for *Challenges*: A Transdisciplinary Journal Promoting Planetary Health and Flourishing for All

Susan L. Prescott <sup>1,2,3,\*</sup>  and David Webb <sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Medical School, University of Western Australia, Perth, WA 6009, Australia

<sup>2</sup> Nova Institute for Health, Baltimore, MD 21231, USA

<sup>3</sup> Family and Community Medicine, University of Maryland, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA

<sup>4</sup> Business School, University of Western Australia, Perth, WA 6009, Australia; dave.webb@uwa.edu.au

\* Correspondence: susan.prescott@uwa.edu.au

## 1. Introduction—*Challenges*’ Strong Foundations in Planetary Health

Since its inception in 2010, *Challenges* has had a strong interdisciplinary focus on sustainability and global challenges, including many important contributions to advances in renewable energies, biodiversity, food security, climate change, urban and rural development, green design, and the interrelated implications for human and environmental health. In 2015, the emerging concept of “planetary health” provided an overarching framework for integrating the many diverse but inherently connected aspects of the biophysical, social, cultural, and economic challenges regarding global flourishing [1] (Box 1).

### Box 1. Defining planetary health.

The Planetary Health Alliance defines planetary health as “a solutions-oriented, transdisciplinary field and social movement focused on analyzing and addressing the impacts of human disruptions to Earth’s natural systems on human health and all life on Earth”. This emphasizes the interdependence of all natural and anthropogenic ecosystems—including the social, economic, political, and cultural value systems that support or undermine wellbeing. It also underscores the need for integrated multidimensional solutions from many different fields.

For the last few years, *Challenges* has adopted this framework and published numerous papers on diverse aspects of planetary health, including “The Canmore Declaration: Statement of Principles for Planetary Health” in 2018 [2]. *Challenges* has also hosted a series of Special Issues on topics related to planetary health, including proceedings from several planetary health conferences. Building on this important history, we are excited to announce that *Challenges* is formalizing its role as a planetary health journal.

Throughout this period, planetary health has rapidly emerged as a transdisciplinary field that is becoming increasingly important for cross-sectoral solutions to the mounting physical, social, and economic threats to the health of humans and all natural systems [3], leading to the rapid expansion of the Planetary Health Alliance (PHA)—which now includes more than 420 universities, non-governmental organizations, research institutes, and government entities from around the world committed to understanding and addressing global environmental change and its health impact [4]. By the end of 2023, searching the term “planetary health” yielded over 1700 results on PubMed, with 94% of these results corresponding to papers published since 2019. This trajectory is anticipated to continue with increasing calls for integrated solutions to our growing interdependent challenges. This accelerating interest has occurred in tandem with the 2015 United Nations (UN) Action Plan for People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace—now better known by its specific objectives, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [5]. In addition, planetary health concepts are now being adopted by the G7, G20, UN General Assembly, and European Union.



**Citation:** Prescott, S.L.; Webb, D. A New Vision for *Challenges*: A Transdisciplinary Journal Promoting Planetary Health and Flourishing for All. *Challenges* **2024**, *15*, 26. <https://doi.org/10.3390/challe15020026>

Received: 14 May 2024

Accepted: 15 May 2024

Published: 17 May 2024

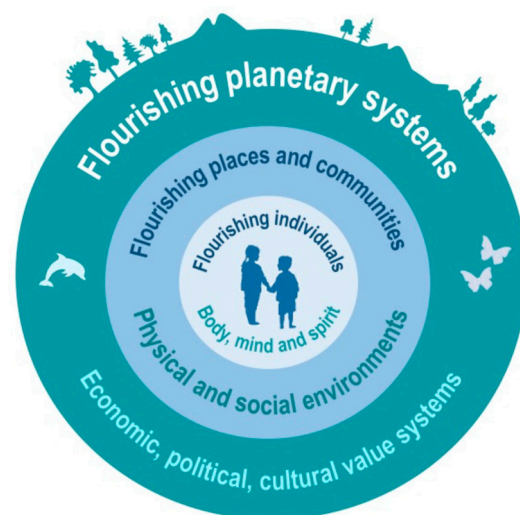


**Copyright:** © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Given the mounting challenges threatening planetary health (the interconnected well-being of all systems), as well as *Challenges*' history in this space for almost 15 years, we recognize the great value in redefining the scope of this journal to address planetary health more specifically and promote these interdisciplinary concepts more widely. The planetary health banner also provides a logical narrative that can improve the overall cohesion of the existing diverse contributions to *Challenges* since it was established.

## 2. Providing an Integrated Vision That Promotes Concepts of Planetary Health

Planetary health provides an overarching vision of the ecological interdependence of all life on Earth and principles that prioritize well-being across all sectors of society in a more integrated way, connecting the health and vitality of individuals, communities, and Earth's natural systems [1,3,6]. This also encompasses the human-made social, political, and economic "ecosystems" that influence attitudes, values, and behaviors—of individuals and whole societies (Figure 1). It underscores the need for more mutualistic strategies that address the policies and practices (and the attitudes and values that govern these) for solutions that provide co-benefits for "people, places and planet" [6]. This is now reflected in the 2022 WHO health policy brief, which reframes the health agenda with a whole-of-society approach that spans from the planetary to the individual scale, emphasizing societal values and life-course approaches [7]. This transition from public to planetary health calls for wider integration [8] built upon on principles of social and ecological justice [9].



**Figure 1.** A Laudable Goal—Flourishing for All. A Laudable Goal—Flourishing as more than the absence of disease: Equitable flourishing and fulfillment for individuals require societies, systems, and values that promote mutual flourishing. It also depends on overcoming the systemic factors that undermine these factors, recognizing the interconnected ways they influence the wellbeing of people, places, and the planet (copyright the author, SLP, reproduced with permission [5]).

Solutions require more holistic approaches to research and policy and educational frameworks that promote emotional intelligence, moral wisdom, and cultural competency. For these reasons, *Challenges* seeks to provide a forum for greater cross-sectoral collaboration, including greater engagement with the social sciences, arts, and humanities in addition to the biological, physical, and technical sciences.

In keeping with this planetary health vision, *Challenges* encourages both research and academic advocacy for social and environmental justice and human flourishing. While developing new technologies remains essential for *Challenges*, the planetary health agenda also includes the evolution of more nurturing societies. This is key to overcoming the attitudes and behaviors undermining human wellbeing and planetary health. *Challenges* therefore also welcomes work addressing values, education, policy, and cultural capacities and of a more cross-sectoral collaborative nature. We believe this approach is vital

to contribute to social change for solutions that cannot be achieved through advances in technology alone. This includes addressing the mounting calls for a “spiritual and cultural transformation” [10] that recognizes the importance of Indigenous and diverse faith perspectives and academic support for social movements in addition to important scientific discovery. *Challenges* seeks to influence academic discourse, encouraging researchers to apply these holistic approaches to accelerate meaningful cultural change and sustainable actions.

### 3. The New Description and Aims of *Challenges*

In this context, the scope and specific aims of *Challenges* [11] have been refined to focus on this comprehensive transdisciplinary vision of planetary health, as stated below.

We now describe *Challenges* as a “transdisciplinary, peer-reviewed, open access journal on planetary health that welcomes contributions addressing any aspect of the Grand Challenges created by human disruptions to Earth’s natural systems in the Anthropocene and the impacts on human wellbeing and all life on Earth”. Our journal strives to broaden the perception of wellbeing to encompass all systems and encourage efforts to “accelerate cross-sectoral progress toward the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by integrating solutions from the natural, social and health sciences and the humanities”.

Reframed in this way, *Challenges* will continue to “provide an advanced forum for publishing content related to planetary health, including ecological, technical, social, economic, cultural, behavioral, theoretical, organizational, philosophical, spiritual, and educational solutions that address the Grand Challenges of the Anthropocene”. With this stated aim, we define planetary health more specifically for our contributors, as currently described by the Planetary Health Alliance (above), to underscore the importance of “collaboration and knowledge exchange among diverse fields for a holistic understanding of the interdependence of all natural and human systems”.

### 4. The New Scope of *Challenges*

We welcome manuscripts that address challenges to different aspects of planetary health. Regardless of specific focus, authors should underscore the relevance to flourishing of human societies and the natural systems on which we depend. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- (1) Human Flourishing (health and wellbeing)—including the interplay between human beings and their physical, emotional, social, economic, and political environments.
- (2) Climate Change and Earth’s Biophysical Systems (human interdependence and impact on large scale “planetary boundaries”).
- (3) Biodiversity and Natural Ecology (including microbial systems).
- (4) Food Systems.
- (5) Regenerative Economies (including regenerative business and wellbeing economies).
- (6) Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
- (7) Sustainable Energies (with an emphasis on risks and benefits to human and planetary systems).
- (8) Social Trends and Transitions (including psychology, attitudes, behaviors and movement building).
- (9) Technologies (solutions and risks to planetary health).
- (10) Ethics, Values, and Spirituality (worldviews and mindsets that influence planetary health and justice).
- (11) Planetary Health Education (including knowledge, skills, emotional intelligence, and moral wisdom).
- (12) Governance, Development, Policy, Peace, and Justice (including infrastructure, planning, law, for more livable, fair, and sustainable systems).

All submissions to *Challenges* are expected to highlight how the work is relevant to planetary health and how the findings directly impact flourishing of humans and/or the environments on which we depend. Where possible, authors should indicate how their

work addresses the sustainable development goals (SDG) of the 2015 United Nations Action Plan for People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace. All regional studies should be framed within a global context, and all papers should be written with a wide transdisciplinary audience in mind.

In addition to high-quality research papers and review papers, we also invite novel viewpoints, topics, and formats typically not found in traditional research journals, recognizing the importance of creating new perspectives as well as new knowledge. While maintaining the highest academic standards, this may include exploratory work, policy studies, case studies, creative and artistic perspectives.

## 5. Conclusions

As Editor-in-Chief and Associate Editor, we are very excited by the new opportunities that *Challenges* will create by adopting this transdisciplinary planetary health framework. To address the mounting interconnected global challenges affecting all aspects of life, it is critically important to promote tapestry thinking [12,13] for holistic understanding and integrated solutions [14]. With few journals addressing the planetary health agenda, *Challenges* is ideally placed for contribution and to encourage all researchers, regardless of their fields, to consider how their work contributes to improving human flourishing and all life on our planet—and the systems and structures intended to support it.

We would like to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of all our authors, our peer reviewers, and the entire editorial board in service of *Challenges* and our community of readers. We will continue to work tirelessly with our editorial board to maintain a rigorous and efficient peer-review process, paying close attention to all submissions to ensure they are carefully pre-checked for relevance within the new scope of *Challenges* before progressing to full peer-review.

It is our hope that *Challenges* will continue to facilitate collaborative vision and shared agendas aimed at solving the interconnected challenges of the Anthropocene and promoting the wellbeing of people, places, and our planet.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, S.L.P. and D.W.; validation, S.L.P. and D.W.; formal analysis, S.L.P. and D.W.; writing—original draft preparation, S.L.P. and D.W.; writing—review and editing, S.L.P. and D.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## References

1. Whitmee, S.; Haines, A.; Beyrer, C.; Boltz, F.; Capon, A.G.; de Souza Dias, B.F.; Ezeh, A.; Frumkin, H.; Gong, P.; Head, P.; et al. Safeguarding human health in the Anthropocene epoch: Report of The Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Commission on planetary health. *Lancet* **2015**, *386*, 1973–2028. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
2. Prescott, S.L.; Logan, A.C.; Albrecht, G.; Campbell, D.E.; Crane, J.; Cunsolo, A.; Holloway, J.W.; Kozyrskyj, A.; Lowry, C.A.; Penders, J.; et al. The Canmore Declaration: Statement of Principles for Planetary Health. *Challenges* **2018**, *9*, 31. [CrossRef]
3. Myers, S.S. Planetary health: Protecting human health on a rapidly changing planet. *Lancet* **2017**, *390*, 2860–2868. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
4. Planetary Health Alliance: What is Planetary Health? Available online: <https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/planetary-health> (accessed on 5 May 2024).
5. United Nations. Transforming Our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations General Assembly, Seventieth Session Agenda Items 15 and 116. Available online: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (accessed on 5 May 2024).
6. Prescott, S.L.; Logan, A.C.; Bristow, J.; Rozzi, R.; Moodie, R.; Redvers, N.; Haahtela, T.; Warber, S.; Poland, B.; Hancock, T.; et al. Exiting the Anthropocene: Achieving personal and planetary health in the 21st century. *Allergy* **2022**, *77*, 3498–3512. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
7. World Health Organization. Valuing Health for All: Rethinking and building a whole-of-society approach. In *The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All—Council Brief No. 3*; World Health Organization: Geneva, Switzerland, 2022.
8. Horton, R.; Beaglehole, R.; Bonita, R.; Raeburn, J.; McKee, M.; Wall, S. From public to planetary health: A manifesto. *Lancet* **2014**, *383*, 847. [CrossRef] [PubMed]



9. Prescott, S.L.; Logan, A.C. Transforming Life: A Broad View of the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease Concept from an Ecological Justice Perspective. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2016**, *13*, 1075. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
10. James Gustave Speth Shared Planet: Religion and Nature, BBC Radio Interview. Available online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b03bqws7> (accessed on 3 March 2023).
11. About Challenges: Aims, Scope and Information. Available online: <https://www.mdpi.com/journal/challenges/about> (accessed on 5 May 2024).
12. Logan, A.C.; Nadkarni, N.M. Tapestry Thinking: An Interview with Dr. Nalini Nadkarni on an Unexpected Life in Science. *Challenges* **2022**, *13*, 61. [CrossRef]
13. Prescott, S.L. Planetary Health Requires Tapestry Thinking—Overcoming Silo Mentality. *Challenges* **2023**, *14*, 10. [CrossRef]
14. Logan, A.C.; Berman, B.M.; Prescott, S.L. Earth Dreams: Reimagining ARPA for Health of People, Places and Planet. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2021**, *18*, 12788. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

## Short Biography of Authors



**Prof. Susan L. Prescott MD, PhD**, is a pediatrician, immunologist, artist, and award-winning author, internationally recognised for her cutting-edge research into the early environmental determinants of health and disease. Her work promotes awareness of the interconnections between personal and planetary health in ways that inspire creative, integrated, and wise approaches, grounded in reciprocity, for social and ecological justice and flourishing futures. Susan is Professor of Planetary Health at *University of Western Australia* in Perth where she is founding Director of *The ORIGINS project*, an intervention birth cohort of 10,000 families aimed at improving all aspects of long-term physical and emotional health. She is also an Adjunct Professor in Family and Community Medicine, University of Maryland, Baltimore. She is Editor-in-Chief of *Challenges* journal which promotes interdisciplinary discourse in planetary health, and founding Director of the *Nova Network* (formerly *inVIVO Planetary Health*), a global trans-transdisciplinary network focused on transforming health of people, places, and planet, based at the *Nova Institute for Health* in Baltimore, and She is a Fellow of the *Royal Australasian College of Physicians* and the *Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences*. She has been awarded more than \$52 million in research grants as chief investigator and received numerous awards. Previously, she was a Director of the *World Allergy Organization* (2012–2016) and the founding President of the *DOHaD Society (Developmental Origins of Health and Disease)* of Australia and New Zealand (2014–2018). In addition to over 400 scientific publications, Susan is author of several books for the public.



**David Webb MBA, PhD**, is an Associate Professor at the University of Western Australia Business School. In addition to being a regenerative solutions, planetary health and business ethics educator, he is a researcher, author, presenter and personal coach. With a focus on motivational psychology, and often through a self-determination theory lens, his research explores both pro-social and pro-environmental behavior challenges across a range of contexts, including the interface between marketing systems and quality of life, and the psychology of consumption. Among other awards, David was awarded Distinguished Research Fellow of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS) in 2010 for substantial research contributing to a better understanding of Quality of Life issues. He has held numerous international academic and industry positions in Germany, the Far East, the United States, and the United Kingdom, together with an executive position at a management consultancy firm in South Africa. He is Associate Editor of the *Journal of Macromarketing*, Associate Editor of *Challenges* and a member of the Planetary Health Alliance.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.