Public Health Association of Australia:
Policy-at-a-glance – Limits to Growth and Public Health Policy

Key message: PHAA will –

1. Raise awareness within PHAA and in the broader public health domain about the Limits to Growth and impacts on health.
2. Work with other Special Interest Groups, Branches and other organisations to advocate to governments and business for a society that operates economically and socially within ecological limits.

Summary: Limits to growth (LtG) refers to complex inter-related environmental and social phenomena, that include human population, global environmental change, access to energy, and resources (e.g. phosphorus, petroleum) scarcity that together have the potential to damage human health and even threaten the scope of civilisation.

The health-environmental links occur most strongly through energy sources, food production and transport, the increasing scarcity of fresh water, biodiverse ecosystem cycles and functions, other resource scarcities and the possibility of conflict.

The risks to human health from LtG are likely to be significant, and inequitable among populations and between generations, but are inadequately appreciated.

Audience: PHAA membership, general public, Federal, State and Territory Governments, policy makers and program managers.

Responsibility: PHAA’s Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group (SIG).

Date policy adopted: September 2016

Contacts: Dr Peter Tait, Convenor, Ecology and Environment SIG
Limits to Growth and Public Health Policy Statement

Refer also to PHAA policies on Ecologically Sustainable Human Society, Preparing for Peak Oil, Safe Climate, Ecologically Sustainable Population for Australia, Food Nutrition and Health and Health Inequities.

The Public Health Association of Australia notes that:

1. Limits to Growth (LtG) refers to complex inter-related environmental and social phenomena, that include human population, global environmental change and global economy, access to energy, and resource scarcity, that together have the potential to damage human health and even threaten the scope of civilisation.

2. The inter-related environmental and social phenomena encompass the dimensions of planetary health, a safe operating system for living systems on earth and planetary boundaries.

3. The term LtG was introduced by the 1972 Club of Rome report. Originally LtG modelling included analysis of the standard run based on business as usual social and economic practices. In this scenario without social behaviour change or technological progress humanity faces overshoot and collapse in the mid-21st century.

4. A review of the LtG modelling compared thirty years of data for population, industrial output per capita, food supply, services per capita, global pollution and non-renewable resources available. The review showed that humanity is tracking along the business as usual model.

5. Forecasts for global system collapse vary but agree that limits to availability of sufficient resources including raw materials, land, water and energy will result in crisis for ecological and social resilience.

6. Addressing LtG is vital to supporting wellbeing and health through ecological and social determinants pathways.

7. Reaching or passing these limits has direct health effects, resources will be inadequate to meet fundamental human needs, waste production will overwhelm ecosystem capacity, and consequent disruption to secure food supply, fresh water and clean air will adversely affect health from ecosystem to planetary levels.

The Public Health Association of Australia affirms the following principles:

8. The concept of ‘Limits to Growth’ is important to public health because it is an important eco-social issue which impacts on human wellbeing and health. Its effects cannot be fully avoided; action is require to mitigate and adapt to likely effects.
PHAA Policy Statement on: Limits to Growth and Public Health

9. All policy development should recognise the ecological and social determinants of health and be founded on principles of environmental and social equity, and emphasise the limits to resource and energy use within a planetary closed system.

10. Limits to growth pose a real threat to global safety, health and human development. Overshoot and collapse can be averted by changes to values and divestment from the current economic growth mentality and by implementing policies and systems that support and promote social change and technological innovation and the transition to environmentally and socially sustainable and just world.

11. Public health practitioners, policy makers, advocates and researchers should be conversant with these issues.

The Public Health Association of Australia through the Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group resolves to undertake the following actions:

12. Raising awareness of LtG with the general public, business and government so that this informs Australian government and business policies and systems in order to avoid ecological overshoot.

13. Promote ecological determinants of health on a background of resource limits and population pressure.

14. Raise awareness within PHAA and in the broader public health domain about the limits to growth and its impacts on health.

15. Work with other Special Interest Groups, Branches and other organisations to advocate to governments and business for a society that operates economically and socially within ecological limits.


First adopted at the 2013 Annual General Meeting of the Public Health Association of Australia. The latest revision has been undertaken as part of the 2016 policy review process.
PHAA Policy Statement on: Limits to Growth and Public Health

References


