What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Global Goals, are a set of 17 goals which lay out a path to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, protect the planet, and provide a framework for sustainable development efforts both at the global and local level (see Box 1). The SDGs, together with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, form the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

There are 196 associated targets within the SDGs and each goal has a set of indicators to help measure progress. The 2030 Agenda was agreed to by 193 Member States at the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015. It is a comprehensive, progressive and innovative agenda that responds to the many global challenges facing sustainable development. It is an action plan for people, planet and prosperity which pledges to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. The UN seeks full implementation of the Agenda by the year 2030.

The SDGs and targets are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account the differing national actualities, capacities, and levels of development whilst at the same time respecting domestic policies and priorities. Targets are described as being aspirational and globally focused, with each member state setting its own domestic targets. The goals build upon the success from the now expired Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and seek to complete what these goals did not achieve, and unlike the MDGs, which only applied to developing countries, the SDGs are unique in the way which they call for action by all countries over varying economic status to promote prosperity whilst protecting the planet.

While the SDGs are not legally binding, all UN member states are expected to take ownership and establish domestic frameworks for the achievement of each goal, with countries also having the primary responsibility for follow-up and review at both the national and international levels. There are 232 agreed indicators which will guide this process. The indicators are designed to be disaggregated where possible and relevant, by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location.

Why does Australia care?

There may be a perception in Australia, as a wealthy nation, that the SDGs are only for developing countries. This is specifically addressed in the resolution adopting the goals – “These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike” (p3). As a prosperous country, Australia has the responsibility to support and contribute to global development efforts. These efforts will not only assist in promoting stability and reduced vulnerability in developing nations, but serves in the nations own interests to build upon our own economic security and future. The SDGs represent goals and targets which will make Australia itself more prosperous, fair and sustainable. Examples include reducing non-communicable disease, promoting gender equality and reducing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Investing in the sustainable development of other countries will also limit any possible negative impacts on our own country.
The 2030 Agenda works at both domestic and international levels and is well aligned with the interests of Australia in promoting regional stability, security and economic prosperity. Australia has actively participated in the international discussions on the SDGs, and assisted in the design and development of the 2030 Agenda. Australian Government coordination on implementation of the 2030 Agenda is led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.6

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) strongly supports Australia’s implementation of the SDGs, and believes they are central to our work. The PHAA’s strategic direction is underpinned by the World Federation of Public Health Association’s Global Charter for the Public’s Health, which was specifically designed to be read in conjunction with the SDGs.7

---

**Box 1 - Sustainable Development Goals**

**Goal 1.** End poverty in all its forms everywhere
**Goal 2.** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
**Goal 3.** Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages
**Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
**Goal 5.** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
**Goal 6.** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
**Goal 7.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
**Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
**Goal 9.** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
**Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries
**Goal 11.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
**Goal 12.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
**Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*
**Goal 14.** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
**Goal 15.** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss
**Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
**Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

*Acknowledging that the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](https://unfccc.int) is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

---

May 2018
References


