

Overview

The School of Nursing and Midwifery (SoNM), UniSQ, recognises the deep interconnection between human health and the condition of the planet. Planetary health refers to the wellbeing of human civilisation and the natural systems that sustain it. Current global challenges—including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution—are driving illness, disrupting health services, and widening health inequities.

Evidence and emerging health risks

Environmental changes are already affecting health through rising temperatures, bushfires, flooding, storms, declining air quality, and pressures on food and water systems. National and global assessments indicate these risks will intensify, placing increased burden on health systems (Romanello et al., 2025). Impacts will be unequal, disproportionately affecting First Nations communities, rural and remote populations, older adults, people with chronic illness, and those experiencing social and economic disadvantage (Amoatey et al., 2025). The World Health Organization identifies climate change as the greatest global health threat of the 21st century (WHO, 2023).

Professional responsibilities

Nurses and midwives are frontline responders during climate-related events and have ethical obligations to advocate for environments that support health (Butterfield et al., 2021). The International Council of Nurses (ICN) Code of Ethics (ICN, 2021), International Council of Nurses (ICN) definition of nursing (ICN, 2026), and Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) Standards of Practice (NMBA, 2016) emphasise health promotion, illness prevention, evidence-based practice, and responding to emerging health risks. Understanding and addressing environmental determinants of health is therefore integral to professional practice.

Preparing future workforce

Graduates will practice during a period of accelerating environmental change. They must be equipped to manage new and evolving health risks, support community resilience, and contribute to sustainable health systems.

Collective leadership

While individual nurses and midwives play a vital role, collective action is essential. As one of the world's largest health workforces, the professions are uniquely positioned to influence mitigation, adaptation, advocacy, and system-level change to protect human and planetary wellbeing.

SoNM Planetary Health Commitment

Mission

To provide evidence-based, contemporary education grounded in the responsibility to people, community and the planet that prepares nurses and midwives to address health challenges arising from planetary change.

Vision

To graduate nurses and midwives who understand the relationship between human and planetary health, act ethically, and contribute to resilient, sustainable health systems.

Values

We value

- Respect for the planet and natural systems that sustain life
- Equity, self-determination, and culturally safe health systems
- Ethical, sustainable healthcare practices
- Evidence-based action that protects health now and into the future

Commitments

The SoNM commits to:

- Integrating planetary health across all nursing and midwifery programs
- Developing educator capability in emerging evidence on planetary health
- Working alongside First Nations Communities to embed Connection to Country and cultural knowledges
- Preparing graduates to recognise environmental determinants of health to respond to climate-related health risks in clinical practice
- Encouraging leadership and advocacy in planetary health
- Promoting sustainability in SoNM teaching, operations, and partnerships

References

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