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FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE:
EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY IN INTERPROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

A scaffolded approach across the health professions curriculum

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SAAHE: Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice SIG
UWC: Interprofessional Education Unit

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SUSTAINABILITY SHOULD BE A THREAD

From knowing about sustainability to learning how to act on it collaboratively.

Understand health

Health is shaped by social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions - not only biology or individual choices

Learn across professions

Complex health challenges require students to integrate different professional perspectives and community knowledge

Practice sustainable care

Students need to consider prevention, equity, resource use and longer-term consequences in real cases

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WHY INTERPROFESSIONAL LEARNING?

IPE gives students opportunities to practice the collaboration that sustainable care requires.

- **Interconnected health**

Social, environmental and clinical factors interact. No single profession has the whole picture.

- **Shared decisions**

Teams balance effectiveness, equity, patient priorities, resource use and longer-term consequences.

- **Learn before practice**

Students need to learn with, from and about each other while solving authentic problems.

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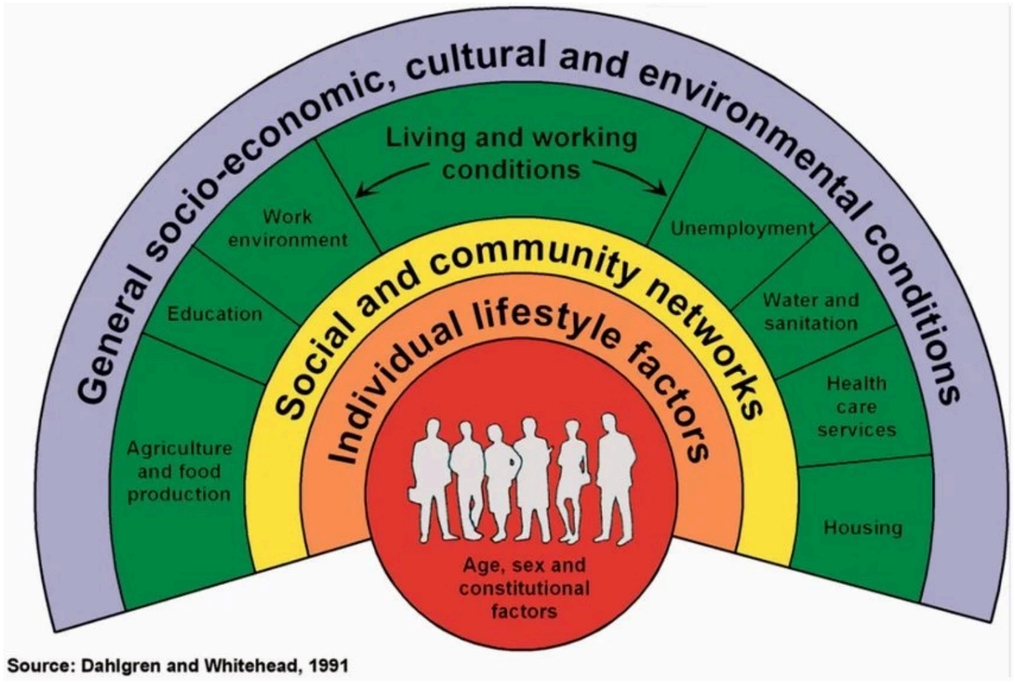
YEAR 1 — PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Make sustainability visible in the determinants of health

How we currently teach the model

- Socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions shape living and working conditions.
- Housing, education, food production, water and sanitation, healthcare and employment influence daily health opportunities and risks.
- Social networks and individual lifestyle factors influence health and wellbeing.
- Age, sex and constitutional factors interact with these wider determinants to influence the individual's health.



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991

What we should add:

- How human health depends on healthy natural systems.
- Climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss affect living conditions and health.
- Consider sustainable use of food, water, energy and healthcare resources.
- Strengthen the capacity of people and communities to withstand health threats.
- Consider how decisions today affect the health of future generations.

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YEAR 2 — HEALTH PROMOTION

Move from theory to community action

How we currently teach	What we should add	What students should show
• Students explore how determinants of health influence children at the school • Work in interprofessional teams on a health promotion project	• Make sustainability a visible criterion throughout the assessment task ◦ Not an optional extra in the project rationale	• A community-informed, feasible and equitable project, evaluated for outcomes and its potential to continue beyong the student placement

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YEAR 3 — SHARED RESEARCH

Connect community research to the Sustainable Development Goals

How we currently emphasise	What we should add	What students should show
• Students identify and investigate problems arising in their practice communities through collaborative research	• Ask teams to identify relevant SDG(s), explain the connection and link them to the intended impact of their research	• A clear line from local problem → research question → intended impact → broader sustainable development priorities

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YEAR 4 — STUDENT-LED IPE WELLNESS CENTRE

Take comprehensive primary healthcare beyond the clinic

INTERPROFESSIONAL CARE PLAN

	CURATIVE	REHABILITATION	PREVENTION	PROMOTION
WHAT Activities that will achieve objectives			*Secondary complications:* _____ _____ _____ _____ *Reoccurrence:* _____ _____ _____ _____ *What activities will preventthe above:* _____ _____ _____ _____ *Who can assist with activities:* _____ _____ _____ _____	*(What policies, support, action, and or skills are required to reach and maintain a state of well-being?)*
WHO Team and their role in achieving objectives				
HOW Appropriate intervention				
WHEN Logistics such as date, time and place				

People who do not reach the Wellness Centre may still need prevention, health promotion and support.

Make population approaches actionable
Education and skills promotion; community outreach; reorientation of health services; partnerships and referral pathways.

Design for reach
Who is not accessing the service, why not, and how will our approach reach them?

Population approaches must become more than idealistic plans.

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THREE SMALL CURRICULUM CHANGES CAN MAKE SUSTAINABILITY VISIBLE

Sustainability becomes meaningful when learning outcomes, activities and assessment align.

Reframe existing content

- Include environmental determinants, planetary health and longer-term effects alongside social and economic determinants.

Enrich existing tasks

- Assess whether projects and care plans are equitable, feasible, community-informed and likely to create lasting benefit.

Align assessment

- Look for systems thinking, integration of professional perspectives, SDG relevance and plans to reach underserved populations.

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