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## Planetary health: countering commercial and corporate power



That the insufficient response to climate change and pollution is jeopardising human life and livelihood,<sup>1</sup> accounting for 7 million deaths annually,<sup>2</sup> is no longer in doubt. Pollution, whether produced locally or transported via air and international trade,<sup>3</sup> is the main cause of death worldwide. The strong correlations between pollution, climate change, and deleterious effects on planetary health are the result of the global economic model.<sup>4,5</sup> Such anthropogenic tendencies exacerbate social and health inequalities, with the most disadvantaged people<sup>1</sup> in low-income countries—women in particular—being disproportionately affected by floods, heat waves, bitter cold, and air pollution.<sup>1</sup> Solutions exist and yet inertia-plagued public policies impede timely implementation of measures urgently needed to counteract pollution and climate change. How can such effects not be considered enough of a threat, in public discourse and actions, to trigger an urgent and immediate embracing of radical measures?

Studies<sup>6</sup> reveal the absence, disconnection, and contradictions of government strategies at different levels. Commercial interests and the influence of corporate lobbies over public policies<sup>4,5,7</sup> are identified as the biggest challenge to governments' lack of engagement, and lack of transparency regarding funding directed towards overturning or silencing such policy initiatives remains a major concern.<sup>4,5,7</sup> Corporate power is at the heart of the world's economic system; wealth accumulation takes precedence, overriding population health.<sup>4,5</sup> It holds the means of production and determines the ways in which discourse is shaped to preserve such forms of development. Povinelli calls it "geontopower",<sup>8</sup> a power over life and non-life of late liberalism, an old and outdated power that has exhausted natural and common resources to maximise shareholders' profits.<sup>7</sup> If public institutions are to produce and promote planetary health, their challenge is to engage seriously in finding ways to counterbalance such power in public policy.

Some initiatives are on the rise, such as corporations investing in clean energy, based on the same economic growth model.<sup>7</sup> Experts<sup>7</sup> have exposed the limitations of such initiatives, which lie in the fundamental tension between the profit-maximising drive of corporations and the need for a profound decarbonisation of

commercial and economic sectors (eg, energy, transportation, manufacturing) that would advance human health. Believing that a life-threatening paradigm can be reversed by the same system, means, and actors that caused it in the first place—ie, relying on business and market logic to reorient the course of climate change—is naive, ineffectual, and irresponsible. Such crucial conditions call, rather, for radical measures. To improve planetary health and produce healthy livelihoods around the world, solutions must be sought outside the wealth logic mechanisms of corporations.

We aim to spark discussion on creative thinking and effective action to protect and promote our most important collective good: planetary health. We propose a framework for countering the effects of corporate power and commercial determinants of health (appendix). This framework is based on the current state of scientific knowledge, inspired by the frameworks of the Canadian Association of Public Health on ecological determinants of health<sup>9</sup> and of the commercial determinants of health defined by Kickbusch and colleagues.<sup>4</sup>

Here we provide strategies for transitioning societies towards a socioecological economic model. First, regulatory restrictions on carbon emissions and pollution should be established and enforced.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, new economic and social development models should be implemented that reflect the importance of sustainable environments.<sup>10</sup> Degrowth, among others, could be considered. Regulatory and transparent funding mechanisms should be established for elections and political campaigns; politicians should engage in a politics of climate change that offers a future for their constituents, undeterred by corporate influence, and common interests for planetary health should take precedence. Additionally, a series of concerted intersectoral and interdisciplinary efforts and collaborations mobilising researchers, politicians, health practitioners, and others who have an effect on health outcomes through their actions should be encouraged and brought into the mainstream. The political role of the public health sector should be reclaimed and strengthened.<sup>10</sup> Health institutions must reclaim their political role in protecting and promoting planetary health. The case against tobacco corporations illustrates

See Online for appendix

the positive influence of such a political role. Similarly, carbon exit success stories could be used as precedents to counterbalance commercial determinants of health.

These levers should be considered seriously when challenging one of the most important determinants of health—commercial and corporate power—to preserve and promote human and planetary health.

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