

NEST: A Canadian Naturopathic Organization for Environmental and Social Responsibility



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'The barriers to action on health and climate change are predominantly societal and not technical, with public and political engagement therefore holding the key to accelerating the pace and scale of action.'¹

This edition on planetary health brings voice to the concerns and perspectives of several of our naturopathic visionaries, while mourning the loss of beloved Walter Crinnion. He was the naturopathic profession's leader, an educator and advocate on environmental medicine. His vision and humour will be sorely missed, but he has left an incredible legacy for others to continue the work he began.

The articles in this issue suggest many ways in which naturopathic doctors (NDs) can become part of the global conversation, and create change in the lives of their patients and families to offset the impact of climate change. All this is wonderful, but together as a profession, we need to develop a co-ordinated, collaborative and networked plan in consultation with all our professional stakeholders to facilitate meaningful and lasting global change.

"This is a silent war going on. We are currently on track for a world that could displace billions of people from their homes, taking away even the most basic living conditions from countless people, making areas of the world uninhabitable from some part of the year....."

The fact that this will create huge conflicts and unspoken suffering is far from secret.....

And yet the link between climate and ecological emergency and mass migration, famine, and war is still not clear to many people. This must change."²

Activist and environmental visionary, Greta Thunberg, is warning all citizens of the crisis that climate change is wreaking on the health and well-being of our global communities, and the devastating consequences for our planet. Her voice is not new, but her presence is. She represents our youth and future generations who will inherit the consequences of climate inaction.

Naturopathic Principles emphasize working in synergy with the healing powers of nature. This requires a healthy earth, healthy food available to all, and pro-action on preventable causes of disease. The principle of "Doctor as Teacher" can be interpreted to imply a moral and professional obligation to becoming leaders for climate action and planetary health.

With our Principles in mind, it is time for us to become **naturopathic activists**, and join the growing environmental and social justice activism movement. NDs need to tell the public who we are and where we stand on climate change. They need to know that we share their concerns and fears, that we have the education and skills to facilitate change, and are willing to act, on their behalf, to address the health and social impacts that climate change brings.

Activism:

the use of direct or noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one.⁴

How can we do this?

Naturopathic Doctors for Environmental and Social Trust (NEST) is a new organization, created by NDs, for NDs, and is dedicated to being the public voice of naturopathic advocacy for social and environmental responsibility. Our mission will include bringing awareness of the unique health and wellness perspective of naturopathic medicine to community and social justice organizations, and building partnerships with those whose values and vision align with our own. We seek to define the role of naturopathic doctors as advocates for planetary health, and inform the members of our profession, our communities, and other health professions of our capacity and goals. Additionally, NEST will bring our advocacy efforts into the political and legislative realms.

NEST has begun as an Ontario-based organization, with consultation and support from the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors (OAND). Our initial plan is to endorse and collaborate on projects with organizations that are addressing the needs of vulnerable communities most affected by climate degradation. NEST's plan also involves bringing naturopathic medicine to individuals who otherwise would not be able to access or afford ND services, including children, the elderly, single parent families, those racialized, Indigenous and LGBTQ, new immigrants and refugees.

Naturopathic Activism:

naturopathic doctors bringing action through co-ordinated, networked plans to address planetary health and climate change, and the environmental and social justice issues that affect the health and wellness of all living beings.

Our first initiative, a collaborative project with a Toronto-based food-justice organization is in the planning stage. Our intention is to involve naturopathic doctors in community-based food security and environmental awareness projects, and support communication and ND-participation throughout Ontario (we hope eventually to have national and international involvement). We have been discussing having naturopathic educational information included in the partner organization's healthy food box program, and on-site food and health information in their mobile food markets that target 'food desert', low income communities.

NEST's nine-member founding board met for its first meeting on August 9. We are now finalizing our vision and mission statements, developing our plans to move forward with our current project, and determining goals and directions for new projects and organizational endorsements. We are planning an outreach for NEST membership within Ontario, seeking participation from NDs in all our communities, especially those of northern, Indigenous and vulnerable communities where those at the greatest health risk to environmental toxicity, food insecurity and social stress reside. We will bring the knowledge and skills learned from these projects to promote and support similar projects in other provinces.

As the founding member of NEST, and a naturopathic elder, it is my belief our profession needs to position itself as a leading health profession striving for environmental stewardship and advocacy, disease prevention and planetary health. Our naturopathic elders and Indigenous teachers have provided us with much knowledge and wisdom for planetary healing and sustainability. Naturopathic doctors have the professional skills and expertise to address the root issues before us and bring our voice to action as those from other health professions have been doing. Are naturopathic doctors willing to accept this responsibility?

Naturopathic doctors must let our profession's representatives and educational institutions know that a naturopathic plan for climate change action is needed. We must promote dialogue and development of strategies to address environmental health and social injustice issues affecting those who are most vulnerable. Our profession's organizations, such as the CAND, provincial associations, Canadian Naturopathic Co-Ordinating Council (CNCC), World Naturopathic Federation (WNF), Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine (CCNM), and the Boucher Institute of Naturopathic Medicine (BINM), all have a role in helping NDs define our focus, and how we can be most effective. These organizations can also support our efforts to communicate and participate with the public and community organizations already dedicated to working towards climate solutions.

NEST is dedicated to being the voice of the naturopathic profession in terms of protecting and promoting the health of individuals, communities and the environment through sustainable and socially conscious strategies. What is different about NEST is that we are not bound by politics; it is the organization's mission to act independently, while collaborating with our professional organizations and learning institutions.

The UN Human Rights Committee recently created the term "climate apartheid"³, linking poverty, poor health and climate change. Such a term implies a strong sense of urgency to addressing climate change and its resulting negative effects on the most vulnerable of human beings. With our knowledge, and guided by our Principles, naturopathic doctors have a unique opportunity to address the urgency of the climate crisis. There really is no time to wait. The naturopathic profession must take action now!

*"We stand now where two roads diverge.....the other fork of the road, the one less travelled, offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth."*⁵

NEST is not an isolated initiative; a small but growing list of initiatives currently led by naturopathic doctors in Canada includes:

- Co-Chair for NEST, Dr. Leslie Solomonian, is co-ordinating the relaunch of the Eco Council, engaging CCNM's students, faculty and administration on climate change discussions and actions, and bringing collaboration with NEST. Plans are underway for a joint event in September. Dr. Solomonian has also brought a call-out to the profession and CCNM for endorsement and participation in the September 27 global climate strike action of Fridays for the Future, the youth action catalyzed by Greta Thunberg.
- The WNF appointed a working group in early 2019, of which I was a member, to produce an educational poster on environmental toxins, and has since formed an Environmental Health Committee. This committee, with representation from at least four world regions, will provide research-based information to the international community of healthcare providers as well as the public about the impact of environmental toxins on health and disease risk. The committee's first meeting was in August, with a two-year plan for completion.
- John Wellner (CEO) and Anna-Liza Badaloo (Manager, Clinical Development) of the OAND have continued to provide advice and strategy supporting NEST's current and ongoing initiatives, with Anna-Liza being an active member of NEST's Board. The OAND has given endorsement of NEST, providing an introduction to NEST at 2018 Convention, NEST announcements in the OAND e-Connect, and info sheets for the delegates at the 2019 AGM and upcoming Convention. There is ongoing dialogue for NEST participation in other OAND events and presentations, as well as organizational and administrative support.

Our national and provincial associations are well positioned to play a vital role in providing similar support and developing policies, mission statements and strategic plans that will inform and educate our stakeholders. For example, communicating to:

- the naturopathic profession about NDs' stance and professional role in climate action;
- other health professions about NDs' goals and intentions to address the public health impacts of environmental toxicity, habitat change, and food security issues caused by climate change;
- the public, letting them know that NDs will act to support their endeavors for planetary action and focus our professional knowledge and skills for their health and well-being; and
- government, making it known that NDs prioritize accountability, and the responsible management and governance of resources for a healthy and sustainable environment.

Let us bring forth the message that prevention is the best medicine, and focus our intentions and actions on issues of poverty, and proactive and preventive health measures. As a meaningful starting point, NEST's focus will be on addressing issues of food insecurity and food waste, and communicating the message that good food is good health. NEST's first public action will be bringing our endorsement and participation in the Global Strike Action.

We encourage every naturopathic doctor reading this to contact NEST and put your passion to good use. It is our belief that working together we can create and bring a naturopathic plan of action for environmental and social change to our local, national and international communities. Please join us – the time is now. 🍁

Contact NEST: NESTNDs@gmail.com

About the Author

Dr. Daria Love, DC, ND has been in professional practice in Toronto for 42 years. As a naturopathic elder, Dr. Love is dedicated to bringing naturopathic engagement to social and environmental justice issues and their effects on global health and the vulnerable within our communities. Her articles, "Impact Donations and Investments: Addressing Environmental and Social Need", and "Naturopathic Activism for Social Justice", have been published by the OAND in 2017 in the Pulse. She is currently Co-Chair of Naturopathic Doctors for Environmental and Social Trust (NEST) with a vision towards promoting the strong role of naturopathic doctors in support of health justice.

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