

On a mission to transform planetary health

The first One Young World – Novartis Caucus took place virtually on February 11, 2021.
Mar 01, 2021



“Planetary health is directly related to human health and if we don’t change, the human species will disappear.” This was the stark warning delivered by Patrice Matchaba, Head, US Corporate Responsibility and President, Novartis US Foundation, at the inaugural One Young World (OYW)-Novartis Caucus 2021.

Patrice’s statement articulated the immense challenge we face as a species, and across two days, nearly 900 delegates from inside and outside Novartis, representing over 40 countries came together online to explore this challenge in detail. Their task was to examine the relationship between environmental sustainability and planetary health.



Operation Planetary Health

VIDEO

Why 'Planetary' Health? Planetary Health is about People and the Planet

We can see how climate change is directly affecting the planet – from floods, to droughts, to shrinking glaciers, and human displacement. But less obvious perhaps, is the effect that the health of the planet is having on human wellbeing – people need clean air to breathe, fresh water to drink, and safe places to live.

At the core of preserving planetary health lies environmental sustainability. Conserving natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity is intrinsically linked to the health of the planet.

And naturally for Novartis, it is also about patients. We recognize that our actions as a Company have an impact on the communities in which we operate, and our aim is to have a positive effect on lives all across the world. We therefore have a responsibility to ensure that our operations and products are as sustainable as possible, protecting human health and conserving the environment. Our focus on planetary health therefore needs to be a holistic one – a sustainability mindset that guides the way we operate across the entire breadth of our value chain.

Putting the planet first is not a new concept for Novartis. Having engaged in environmental sustainability programs for over a decade, the Company adopted a more ambitious stance in response to the growing environmental crisis and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), embracing much more rapid and comprehensive action. And out of this ambition has come a real desire to mobilize our global community to act now and improve our planetary health.

This is what drove the Company's collaboration with One Young World around the Caucus. Reinforcing the message that everyone can play a role in preserving our planetary health, and that any positive action, whether large or small, is helpful, was a key focus of the OYW-Novartis Caucus 2021. Keynote speeches from change makers and environmental sustainability experts, live Q&As, group workshops, and pitch sessions underpinned the three core pillars of the event: to share hope, to inspire and to act.

Sharing hope

While the warnings from experts are stark, the Caucus highlighted an important message: there is still time to act. Although the health of the planet is

at a tipping point, there is a clear opportunity to make the changes needed to improve planetary health, and many reasons to feel hopeful about the future.

Kate Robertson, co-founder of One Young World, stressed that we need to work together as a global community to make a difference – whether as individuals or large international corporations. "Sustainability is not an option, it's not a silo, it's not something to put on the side. We're either all in on sustainability or all bets are off," she said.

We know some of the steps we can take as individuals to reduce our impact on the environment – using less plastic, recycling our waste, reducing our water consumption – but what about big businesses? What can they do?

Discussing how large corporations can put environmental sustainability into action, Steffen Lang, Global Head of Novartis Technical Operations (NTO), described some of the steps that have been taken in the manufacturing and supply of medicines, which have been transforming the Company's environmental impact.

"Each of us has the responsibility to do the right thing. Our goal is to make our manufacturing sites as self-sufficient as possible, creating their own energy, reusing and recycling waste, and optimizing wastewater treatment technology to reuse water as much as possible," he commented. "In addition to our own operations, we also have a responsibility to look at the entire breadth of our value chain when considering our impact on the environment. We are therefore collaborating actively with our suppliers and onboarding them on our sustainability journey."

Inspiring Change

Being aware of the impact our actions have on the planet is one thing; inspiring people to create a path to a better and more sustainable future is a different challenge altogether. How do we encourage ourselves and others to make changes to our daily lives that will reduce our environmental impact and create a future in which both people and the environment can thrive?

At Novartis, Operation Planetary Health is designed to give employees an opportunity to take action. It was born out of a desire to raise awareness about environmental sustainability and create a movement to accelerate change within the organization. It is aligned with our current sustainability strategy, and focusses specifically on the three environmental issues where we believe we can make the greatest progress in achieving our targets: carbon emissions (Scope 3); circular economy; and emerging issues.

James Goudreau, Head of Climate at Novartis spoke passionately about reducing scope 3 carbon emissions – the indirect carbon emissions in our value/supply chain that are a consequence of our operations, but not directly owned or controlled by Novartis. He commented: "Around 20-30% of our carbon footprint is related to our own operations, but 70-80% comes from all those business interactions across the value chain, so in addition to our own behaviors, we have to think of those of others too." Addressing the scale of the problem, he said: "The carbon levels in the atmosphere are currently 418 parts per million; the safe level is 350 parts per million. That level of carbon will drive rapidly accelerating rates of change and contribute to a global health crisis. As a global health company we have a responsibility to act and we can't afford to wait. The actions we take today can change tomorrow."

The circular economy, where we seek to find loops in our value chains to re-use materials, packaging and transport to optimize and eliminate waste, is a top priority for Elisabet Pellicer Rubio, a Waste Technology Engineer at Novartis. She explained that the company has a total of 65 projects underway reducing over 2,800 tons of waste in total, but also noted that we can do much more, stating that we all need to try to reduce, reuse and recycle the materials we use.

Angelique Pouponneau, CEO of the Seychelles' Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust and OYW Ambassador, talked to delegates about less well-known emerging environmental issues. In other words, future threats such as water scarcity and loss of biodiversity. "Currently, our legacy would be an ocean depleted of fish but full of plastics, trees cut to the ground but factories erected, and livestock just to ensure we enjoy that Friday night burger," she warned.

Taking action

With the third pillar of the OYW-Novartis Caucus 2021 being 'to act', a key goal was to provide a framework in which we can all take positive action. As part of Operation Planetary Health, over 300 ideas have been submitted through an internal collaboration platform ahead of the event on how Novartis can reduce Scope 3 carbon emissions, advance the circular economy or tackle emerging issues. Some of those ideas were further refined at workshops around the Caucus and in the near future, some of the most innovative of these ideas will be developed into actionable solutions to be sponsored and implemented across the Company.

Stressing that we need to take action in both our professional and personal lives, Montse Montaner, Chief Sustainability Officer at Novartis commented: "We need to embed an environmental sustainability mindset in the way that we operate as a Company and also in the way we are living outside of it."

Reinforcing the core message of taking personal responsibility when it comes to environmental sustainability, Susanne Schaffert, President of Novartis Oncology said: "It's really up to all of us. It is the little things that will make the difference. I encourage everyone to get started somewhere and contribute to your own destiny."

The OYW-Novartis Caucus 2021 is just one step on a long journey towards a sustainable future and improved planetary health. We all have a responsibility to act – and every action, large or small, makes a difference.

Saving biodiversity, saving the planet and saving humanity are all the same thing. If you see the opportunity to make a difference, you should really take it. Please, let's take action together.

Angelique Pouponneau

[Learn more about the Novartis commitment to Environmental Sustainability](#)

While the climate alarm bells have been ringing for some time, there is still time to act. Great to see longstanding One Young World partner Novartis championing planetary health - the climate emergency is a threat to all of us

David Jones, Co-founder, One Young World

What is One Young World (OYW)?

OYW is a global forum that identifies and connects bright young leaders with the aim of creating solutions to the world's most pressing issues, from climate change to conflict resolution. Since 2010, 26 million people have been reached by OYW Ambassador-led initiatives. OYW-Novartis Caucus 2021: Operation Planetary Health was inspired by the purpose and ambition of OYW and is driven by the Novartis OYW Ambassador community.

[Learn more about OYW](#)

Source URL: <https://prod1.novartis.com/news/mission-transform-planetary-health>

List of links present in page

1. <https://prod1.novartis.com/news/mission-transform-planetary-health>
2. <https://prod1.novartis.com/esg/environmental-sustainability>
3. <https://www.oneyoungworld.com/>