Share what we will say…

Challenges affecting our **planet** also affect our **minds**, communities and healthcare systems

We are a team of researchers, designers, policy-makers and educators aiming to **understand and support** mental health in the current climate and ecological crises.

Our vision is for individuals, communities and healthcare systems to have the **knowledge, tools, and resources** to become resilient to the mental health impacts of climate change.

CLIMATE CARES
Mental health in the climate crisis

Vicious cycle

Climate change is a mental health emergency, both **directly and indirectly impacting** mental health outcomes…
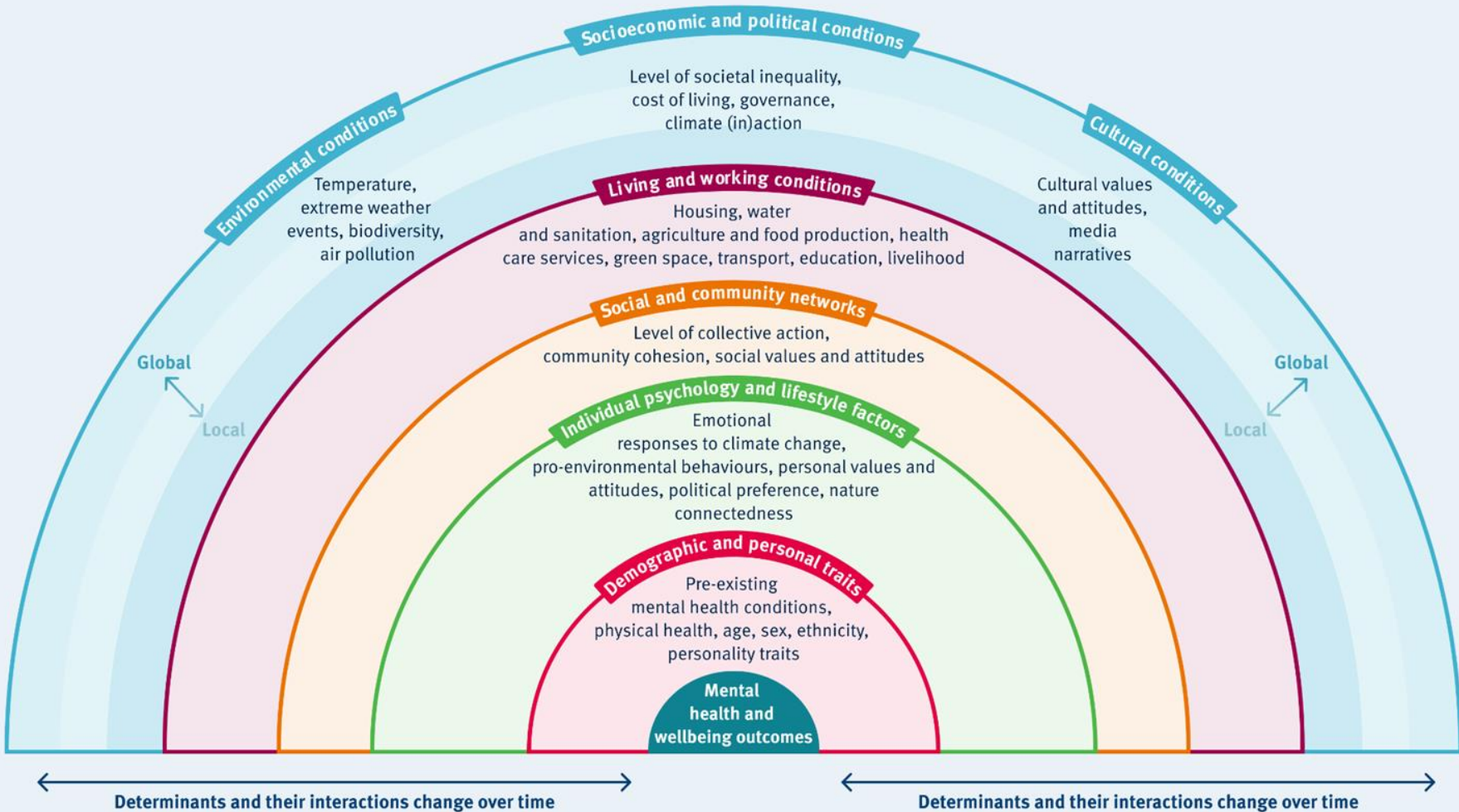
Climate change → **Mental Health**

Vicious cycle

Climate change is a mental health emergency, both **directly and indirectly impacting** mental health outcomes…

Climate change ← **Mental Health**

…which in turn **limit the capacity** of individuals, communities and systems **to cope with and act** on climate change

Socioeconomic and political conditions
Level of societal inequality, cost of living, governance, climate (in)action

Environmental conditions
Temperature, extreme weather events, biodiversity, air pollution

Cultural conditions
Cultural values and attitudes, media narratives

Living and working conditions
Housing, water and sanitation, agriculture and food production, health care services, green space, transport, education, livelihood

Social and community networks
Level of collective action, community cohesion, social values and attitudes

Individual psychology and lifestyle factors
Emotional responses to climate change, pro-environmental behaviours, personal values and attitudes, political preference, nature connectedness

Demographic and personal traits
Pre-existing mental health conditions, physical health, age, sex, ethnicity, personality traits

Mental health and wellbeing outcomes

Global
Local

Global
Local

Determinants and their interactions change over time

Determinants and their interactions change over time

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

Gradual changes in average climatic conditions (e.g. temperature, sea level)

Acute extreme weather events (e.g. floods, fires)

Chronic extreme climate events (e.g. droughts)

Communities **directly** affected by climate impacts ← → Communities **indirectly** affected by climate impacts

- Loss and damage of homes and property
- Crop and livestock damage
- Loss of habitats
- Community breakdown
- Witnessing changes to homelands
- Witnessing or learning about climate and ecological impacts
- Experiencing extreme high temperatures
- Forced migration
- Changes to livelihoods
- Health systems disrupted

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS

New cases of mental illness

Increased symptoms of diagnosable mental illness

Increased susceptibility to physical ill-health or death for those with diagnosable mental illness

Worsened population mental health

Mental and emotional distress

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web: climatecares.co.uk   twitter: @climatecares

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Direct Impacts: Temperature

By 2050, there will be an estimated **22,000 extra suicides** in the **USA and Mexico** alone due to higher temperatures if climate change is not addressed

People with mental disorders are more likely to **die in a heatwave**; the risk is double or even triple

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Direct Impacts: Extreme Weather Events

Psychological impacts from any form of disaster **can exceed physical injury by 40–1**

Indirect Impacts

Imperial College London

In a survey of 2,000 young people aged 8 - 16:

73% said they are very worried about the state of the planet right now

In a survey of 10,000 young people aged 16 - 25:

56% think humanity is doomed, and **⅔** are sad and scared

Across **25 countries** negative emotions about climate change are related to insomnia and poorer mental health

Climate and Ecological distress…

- is almost always **non-pathological;**

- can be an **adaptive, healthy response**

- is a chronic and on-going stressor that **creates or exacerbates mental health challenges**. *(e.g. Clayton 2020)*

Having high wellbeing AND climate distress is possible

"The young people who were worried but still experienced a high degree of subjective well-being also scored **significantly higher on hope, meaningfulness, and anger**". *(Ojala 2021)*

Who is the most affected

Children and young people

Activists

Climate scientists and professionals

Schools and teachers

Directly affected
and those with family directly affected

Parents
and potential parents

Indigenous peoples

Decision makers
and those working with decision makers

Imperial College London

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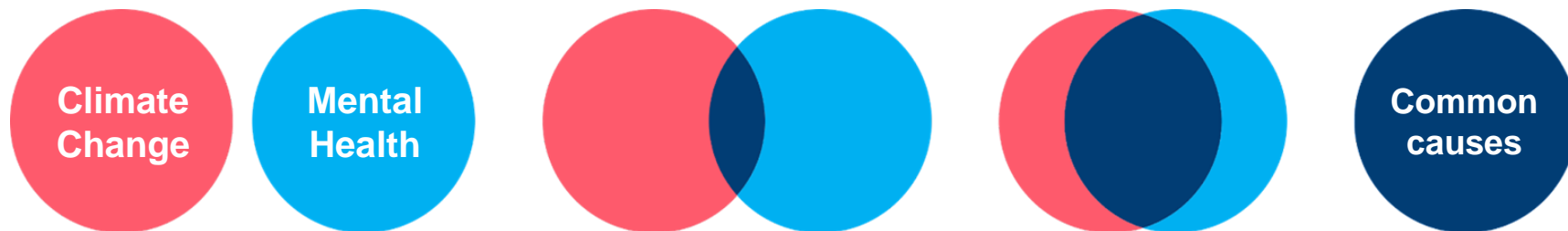
Zooming out on crises

Traditionally we have approached these crises in silos, but they are **deeply and intrinsically linked.** It's essential we hold this perspective.
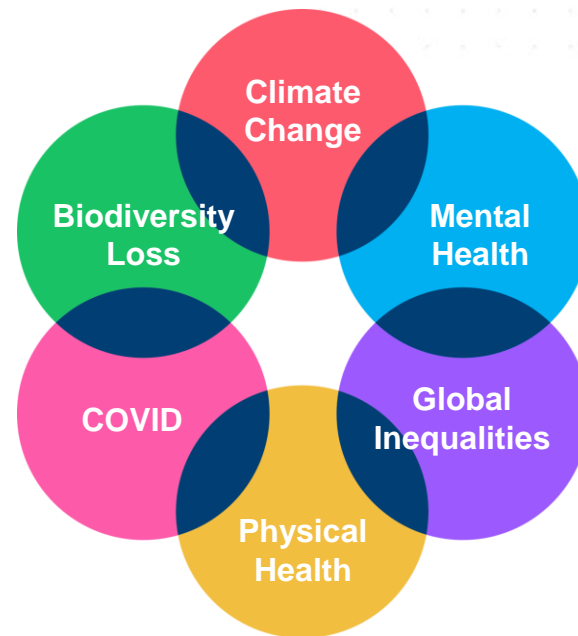
People who live in places with
poor air quality are more likely to…

…die from **COVID-19** *(Harvard)*

…experience **depression, anxiety and higher suicide risk**
(Braithwaite 2018)

…experience **physical health problems** *(Manisalidis et al 2020)*

…be from **low income groups** *(Ferguson et al 2021)*

Potential for a **virtuous** cycle

Our state of mind also impacts the state of our world. The climate and ecological crises are fundamentally attributable to human behaviours and psychology.

State of world ⟶ **State of mind**
⟵

Generating individual and system change requires an awareness of the **interaction between our psychological response to crises and taking action.**
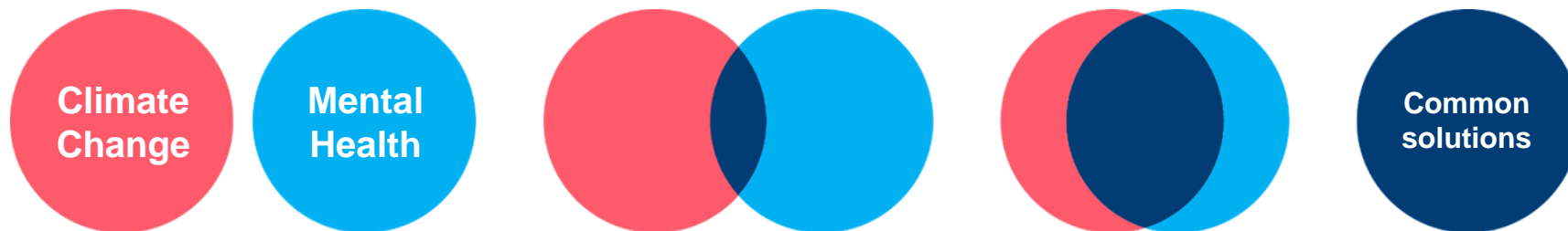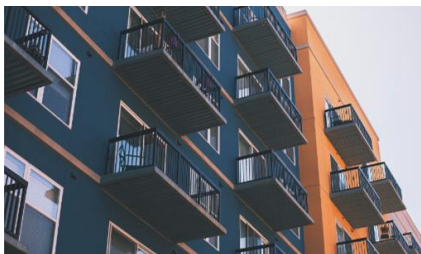
Where we need to go: Systems level

The transformation of society for a **safer climate future and good mental health aligns.**
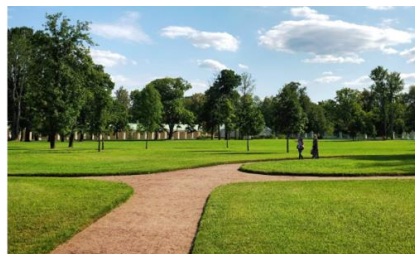
Improving the energy efficiency of housing

- Homes more affordable to heat
- Reduction in fuel poverty
- Improvements in mental health

Increased provision of cycling and walking facilities

- More physical activity improves mental wellbeing
- Reductions in air and noise pollution improves mental health

Increased provision of green and blue spaces

- Trees and water help to reduce temperature extreme
- Connection to nature reduces stress and anxiety

Connected communities

- Strong relationships provide the foundation for good mental health
- Needed to withstand climate shocks
- Needed for climate action

Climate action **relies** on good mental health and social wellbeing

Strong communities are needed to **build capacity for transformation and resilience** to the changing climate - to cope with and act on climate.

→

This is dependent on…

…the strength of our **social fabric and social infrastructures.**

…working with existing infrastructures, **providing mental health support and opportunities for action.**

→

Collective action is a **source of mental health and social support** for climate distress.
(Ojala)

"Climate activism can promote resilience, **particularly when children and young people can emotionally engage in the climate crisis;** when mental health is systemically supported"
(Godden 2021)

Regardless, mental health and wellbeing **requires** community transformation

Global mental health is **calling for more community approaches,**
particularly in youth mental health, to…

Prevent mental ill-health and improve wellbeing by strengthening social connections and sense of belonging.

Provide more timely, accessible and suitable mental health support that can meet the needs of young people where they are.

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Understanding mental health within the context of **communities and cultures**

"When we talk about mental health impacts of climate change, we're talking about **the loss and disconnection of our spiritual identity, our cultural beliefs and our values,** which are essential requirements for our own lifeforce."

Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia

Health of **self**

Health of **community**

Health of **planet**
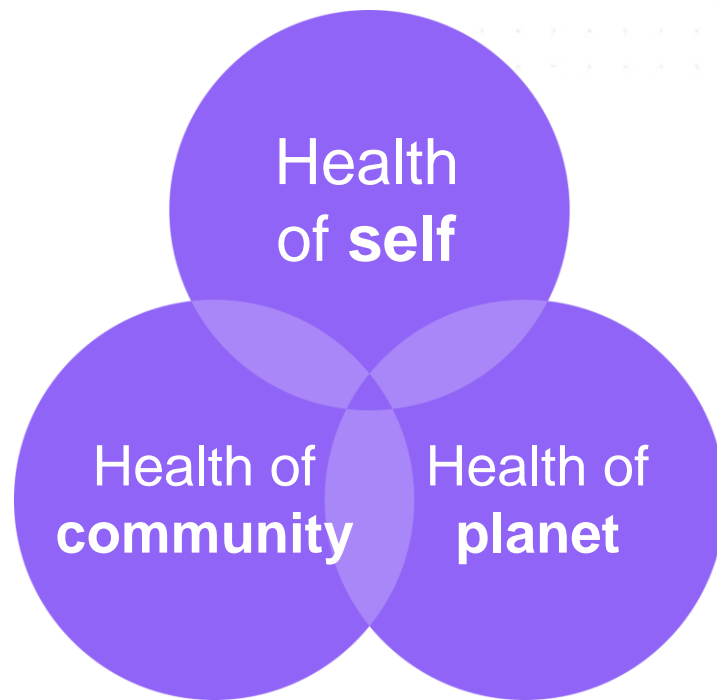
Berry et al 2010, *Godden et al 2021*

Therefore, we need to create a transformational shift, centring **cultures of care** for people and the planet.

Community transformation can **simultaneously…**

Strengthen the capacity of communities to support good mental health and wellbeing, and effectively prevent and treat mental illness.

+

Equip communities with **resilience and transformational capacity to cope with and act on climate,** while that collective action further boosts mental health.

Role of **Public Health**

- **PREVENTIVE:**
- **PROMOTIVE:** Strengthen conditions for **good mental health and wellbeing and a safer climate**
  - Reduce costs on healthcare systems
  - Reduce inequalities
  - Create virtuous cycle
- **Connect** and work with other local actors
  - Support embedded in communities
  - Get involved and involve local communities in adaptation efforts
- **Education and training** for public health professionals
- **Raise awareness** of climate risks and **plan appropriate responses**, e.g. to protect those with mental illnesses from heatwaves.
- **Advocate** for win-win policies and urgent climate action to protect health
- **Net zero in public health systems**

Closing thoughts

The transformation of society that we need for good public mental health and wellbeing is **strongly synergistic** with what we need for a safer climate future.

While the climate emergency is a **risk multiplier for public health,** it is also an **opportunity multiplier.**

Climate Action is Mental Health Action