12.5: Leading and Promoting Environmental Health

Visionary nurse leaders are also responsible for strengthening the presence of the determinants of population health, both internal and external to their health care organizations. The 2017 CNA Code of Ethics guides nurses in providing leadership through individual and community health interventions directed at eliminating environmental threats and improving our health worldwide. As expressed in a 2009 joint position statement put out by the CNA and the Canadian Medical Association, “the physical environment is an important determinant of health” (CNA, 2009b). Each of us has a responsibility for the environment at an individual, community, national, and international level. Health care providers can offer leadership in advocating for environmentally responsible practices and policies. Leadership and advocacy include actions such as:

- “assessing and communicating risks of environmental hazards to individuals, families and communities;
- advocating for policies that protect health by preventing exposure to those hazards and promoting sustainability; and
- producing nursing science, including interdisciplinary research, related to environmental health issues.” (CNA 2009c, p. 1)

Nurses are encouraged to provide leadership in environmental health throughout all areas of nursing practice.