
Global Road Maps Required for Healthcare



In recent years, scientists have highlighted the urgency for countries and industries to limit carbon emissions to help mitigate the dreadful effects of climate change. Interestingly, in what seems to be a paradox, a new report cites the healthcare sector as among the world's largest [greenhouse gas \(GHG\) emitters](#).

The report, from [Health Care Without Harm](#) (HCWH), says that healthcare's global GHG emissions are equivalent to that of 514 coal-fired power plants, noting that the EU healthcare sector is the third largest emitter, which accounts for 12% of the global healthcare climate footprint.

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The report, titled **"Healthcare's climate footprint: How the health sector contributes to the global climate crisis and opportunities for action"**, provides the first-ever estimate of healthcare's climate footprint, including a breakdown for each EU member state.

While vastly differing in scale, the report points out, every nation's healthcare sector directly and indirectly releases greenhouse gases as it delivers care. More than half of healthcare's global climate footprint comes from fossil fuel combustion, according to the report, released earlier this month at events in London, UK, and Medellin, Colombia.

Importantly, the report makes the case for a transformation of the healthcare sector that aligns it with the [Paris Agreement goal of limiting climate change to 1.5 degrees Celsius](#).

Although it's the mission of the healthcare sector to treat patients and save lives, ironically in doing so healthcare facilities also contribute to climate change. **"Places of healing should be leading the way, not contributing to the burden of disease,"** Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the [World Health Organisation](#), points out.

To reduce emissions whilst meeting goals such as universal health coverage, the report calls for a global roadmap for **"Climate-smart healthcare."** In line with this initiative, St. Thomas' Hospital in London hosted the first European Healthcare Climate Summit 2019, which brought together over 120 sustainable healthcare leaders from health system CEOs and representatives from national ministries of health, to clinicians and other health professionals. The summit was opened by Gary Cohen, co-founder and President of [HCWH](#), who outlined **"the moral duty of healthcare to do no harm"** in his keynote speech.

Furthermore, the report outlines immediate actions that stakeholders from across the health sector should take, including:

- Hospitals and health systems should follow the example of thousands of hospitals already moving toward Climate-smart Healthcare via the Healthcare Climate Challenge and other initiatives.
- National and subnational governments should build on existing initiatives to establish action plans to decarbonise their health systems, foster resilience, and improve health outcomes.

- Bilateral aid agencies, multilateral development banks, other health funding agencies and philanthropies should integrate climate-smart principles and strategies into their health aid, lending, and policy guidance for developing countries.

In conclusion, the report says health promotion, disease prevention, universal health coverage, and the global climate goal of net zero emissions must become intertwined.

One of the lead authors of the report, Josh Karliner, International Director of Programme and Strategy at HCWH, stated:

“Hospitals and healthcare systems paradoxically make a major contribution to the climate crisis; healthcare has to step up and do its part to avoid catastrophic climate change, which would be devastating to human health worldwide.”

Dr James Szymankiewicz, Director of Strategy and Partnerships at [The Centre For Sustainable Healthcare](#) (UK), welcomed the report saying it **"clearly lays out [healthcare's] climate impact and responsibility to act."** By embracing ecological sustainability, he explained, healthcare will be able to **"develop global and local solutions to the climate crisis that benefit our communities both now and in the future."**

Source: [HCWH](#) - Health Care Without Harm

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