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Consultation Paper

Sustainable Healthcare Module

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About the Commission

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) was established under the *National Health Reform Act 2011* to lead and coordinate key improvements in safety and quality in health care across Australia. The Commission's key functions include:

- Developing national safety and quality standards
- Developing national safety and quality accreditation schemes for organisations providing healthcare services
- Developing clinical care standards to improve the implementation of evidence-based health care
- Coordinating work in specific areas to improve outcomes for patients
- Providing information, publications and resources about safety and quality.

The Commission partners with patients, carers and clinicians; the Australian, state and territory health systems; the private sector; managers; and healthcare organisations – to achieve a safe, high-quality, and sustainable health system.

The Commission is jointly funded by the Australian Government and by state and territory governments. As a corporate Commonwealth entity and part of the Health portfolio of the Australian Government, the Commission is accountable to the Australian Parliament and the Minister for Health and Aged Care.

About this consultation

The Commission recognises the importance of delivering sustainable, adaptable and resilient healthcare services to meet the dual challenges of reducing the carbon footprint of health services and responding to the health impacts of severe and frequent weather events due to climate change.^{1, 2}

Climate and environmental changes are impacting health and healthcare services globally.³

⁴The Commission has developed a draft Sustainable Healthcare Module (the Module) to support health services reduce these impacts, build climate resilience, adapt systems and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Commission is seeking your feedback on the Module's applicability, content and appropriateness to the health sector.

Why address sustainability?

Australia's health care system is one of the best in the world, however delivering these services contributes 7% of our total greenhouse gas emissions, more than double the proportion in England (3%).⁵

Implementing sustainability in health services protects and promotes the health and wellbeing of current and future generations. It is an opportunity to improve the safety and quality of health care, to reduce low value care and unwarranted variation, and to reduce waste.

Why have a Sustainable Healthcare Module?

Globally, health service organisations are recognising the importance of understanding the impact of health care on the environment and public health. In Australia, several health service organisations are already working to deliver sustainable health care by building adaptable, climate-resilient health services and embracing mitigation strategies.^{1, 6}

To build on these efforts and create national impact, the Commission has developed the Module in collaboration with healthcare providers and industry experts across primary and acute health care.

The Module can be used to drive change in structures, processes and practices in any healthcare setting in Australia.

About the Sustainable Healthcare Module

The Module supports health service organisations to consider the safety and quality implications and opportunities for delivering sustainable, adaptable and resilient health care.

It includes sustainability measures and targets when setting priorities and strategies and when partnering with consumers to design, monitor and evaluate services.

The Module harmonises with other national safety and quality standards⁷ and:

- Recognises the need for the governing body, management, clinicians and the broader workforce to participate in activities that improve the organisation's sustainability

- Promotes collaboration across the health system to consider opportunities and take action
- Recommends evidence-based practices and will be supported by evidenced-based implementation resources^{1, 3, 6}
- Aligns with other environmentally sustainable initiatives and innovations implemented by health service organisations.^{6,1}

A key principle underpinning development of the Module is that the five actions relate directly to the safety and quality of patient care. It also:

- Aims to minimise the compliance burden and maximise the impact of the proposed actions.
- Incorporates clinical decision-making and models of care.

The Module is voluntary. Health service organisations can choose to be assessed against the Module as part of their routine assessment process. The outcome of that assessment will not be considered when their accreditation is determined. The outcomes of assessments will be monitored and evaluated to inform and include in future standards.

What are the benefits of implementing the Sustainable Healthcare Module?

Health service organisations using the Module will:

- Develop the systems to anticipate, recognise and respond to changes in climate-based health demands
- Build resilient systems to plan for adapt to climate threats, and use available resources, while minimising waste
- Reduce the provision of low value care performed
- Develop a workforce with the capacity to understand and interpret risks to sustainable healthcare, as well as build and apply these systems in the workplace.

Scope

The Module has been developed to apply in any healthcare setting across Australia. It leverages the organisation's existing clinical governance framework for its implementation. It can be applied along with other national safety and quality standards with a robust clinical governance framework, such as the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards, the National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards or the National Safety and Quality Primary and Community Healthcare Standards.

Out of scope

The Module does not provide technical guidance on:

- Manufacturing and procurement systems and processes
- Pharmaceutical and medical device or equipment procurement and suitability
- Facility design or the management and maintenance of facilities
- Transport for consumers or staff
- Carbon footprint analysis.

Have your say

The Commission is seeking your feedback on the Module's applicability, content and appropriateness to the health sector.

You are invited to provide feedback on the Module, in whole or in part or for specific actions that are important to you. Consultation will be open for anyone who wishes to participate.

To assist you in providing your feedback, the Commission has developed the following questions as prompts. You are invited to answer all or some of these questions in your response.

- Is there a need for the Module as it applies to health service organisations?
 - If yes, is the Module an effective mechanism to address this issue?
 - If no, what alternative strategy, if any, should be considered by the Commission?
- Do the actions in the Module address the key sustainability and climate-resilience concerns?
 - If no, what additional areas should be covered?
- Are the language and the format of the document appropriate? If not, please provide suggestions.
- How will the actions in the Module support your organisation to mitigate the impacts of climate change, adapt, build climate-resilience and identify opportunities to improve the sustainability of health services?
- Should the Module be assessed by independent external accrediting agencies?
- Please provide any further comments in relation to the Module.

Responses to the consultation questions can be submitted online using the Survey Monkey link below:

[Complete the survey](#)

Additionally, if you would like to provide a written submission to the Commission or if you have any queries regarding the Module, you may send an email to:

NSQHSStandards@safetyandquality.gov.au

Submissions received may be published on the Commission's website. The names and/or organisations making the submission will be included unless you advise the Commission that you would like your submission to be de-identified or to remain confidential.

Draft Sustainable Healthcare Module

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Introduction

Human health and wellbeing depend on the health of the Earth's natural systems. We need access to clean air and water, and nutritious food; stable shelter; and a liveable environment. Over recent decades, evidence shows significant degradation of the Earth's natural ecosystem and increases in greenhouse gas emissions as a result of human activity.^{2, 4, 5}

Increased air and sea temperatures are leading to altered rainfall patterns, more frequent and increasingly severe extreme weather events, and rising sea-levels. International climate projections demonstrate that commitment to reduce greenhouse emissions is essential to prevent further atmospheric temperature rise and extreme weather events, and to protect the population from subsequent health and social impacts.^{2-5, 8} Australia has committed to a whole-of-economy Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.⁹ This plan is strengthened by a range of supporting strategies by state and territory governments, which have committed to monitoring and reducing their carbon footprints and aiming to become carbon neutral by 2050.^{1, 5, 6}

Australia has one of the best healthcare systems in the world. However, health care in Australia produces 7% of total national greenhouse gas emissions, compared with 3% in England.⁵ The health system has a particular responsibility to consider future climate-resilience and sustainability in decision-making processes and commit to its part in achieving Australia's Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan.^{5, 9}

Several health service organisations have recognised this responsibility and have taken opportunities to deliver sustainable health care by building adaptable, climate-resilient health services and embracing mitigation strategies. Various health services have already:

- Completed carbon footprint analyses
- Carried out routine collection and monitoring of sustainability indicators
- Developed strategic sustainability plans to build health services that are resilient and adaptable to the effects of changes in weather and disease patterns
- Implemented a wide range of initiatives to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.^{1, 6}

Providing sustainable health care is becoming a central feature in designing new health service facilities or upgrades, and in production and supply chain management, and waste management.^{1, 3, 6} Health services are mitigating and adapting to climate related challenges and reviewing models of care and clinical practices to reduce low-value care with high carbon output.^{1, 3, 6}

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) recognises the importance of delivering sustainable, adaptable and resilient healthcare services and in doing so, reducing harm from greenhouse gas emissions. The Commission has established a Sustainable Environment Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) to support the development of a set of actions to enable sustainable healthcare for consultation.

The Sustainable Healthcare Module relies upon health service organisations using existing governance, safety and quality systems. A 'system' includes the resources, policies, processes and procedures that are organised, integrated, regulated and administered to accomplish a stated goal.

Safety and quality systems will vary, depending on the size of the organisation and the risks associated with the services being delivered.

Draft Sustainable Healthcare Module

Consumer statement

My health service recognises, plans for, and mitigates the effects of climate-change events to ensure the continuity, safety and quality of my health care.

Intent of the Sustainable Healthcare Module

Health service organisations identify, reduce, manage and improve their sustainability.

Explanatory note

Climate and environmental changes are impacting health and healthcare services globally.^{3,4}

Maintaining human health depends on the state of the Earth's natural systems – through our access to clean air, clean water, nutritious food, stable shelter, and a stable liveable climate. Changes in the global climate and the destabilisation of the Earth's systems can result in:

- Food insecurity
- Increased extreme weather events
- Air and water pollution
- Changing patterns of disease
- Increased burden on health and social care services.²⁻⁴

The delivery of health care contributes to changes in the global climate through practices such as:

- Low-value or unnecessary tests, procedures, or interventions
- Poor waste management
- Uncontrolled procurement of products
- Unnecessary travel
- Poorly implemented or delivered public health and preventative health
- Poor quality use and management of medicines or devices
- Ineffective design and management of facilities.^{1-3, 5}

This Module will support health service organisations to include sustainability measures and targets when setting priorities and strategies and when partnering and consulting with consumers to design, monitor and evaluate services. Action taken to measure and address sustainability outcomes should form part of the health service organisation's safety and quality performance monitoring. The actions within this Module will interrelate with other national safety and quality standards, such as the actions in National Safety and Quality in Health Service Standards Clinical Governance (Actions 1.1, 1.10 and 1.28) and Partnering with Consumers standards (Action 2.11).¹⁰

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| Action | Intent | Suggested strategies |
|---|--|---|
| <p>1. The governing body:</p> <p>a) Provides leadership to maximise opportunities for sustainable healthcare within the health service organisation</p> <p>b) Sets organisational priorities to improve sustainability outcomes</p> <p>c) Considers sustainability outcomes when it partners with consumers in planning, designing, and evaluating healthcare.</p> | <p>The governing body leads the organisation's response to climate risk by setting priorities, ensuring implementation, and reviewing organisational performance.</p> | <p>The governing body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes sustainability priorities and objectives in strategic plans and other organisational policies or governance structures • Sets evidence-based sustainability targets and priorities for the organisation • Ensures that the sustainability strategy aligns with the organisation's governance structures • Includes sustainable healthcare priorities and climate-resilience within the organisation's strategic plans • Ensures partnerships with consumers and other key stakeholders to inform, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the organisation's sustainability performance • Ensures the material risks to health services and infrastructure from climate events are identified and mitigated • Monitors the organisation's response to sustainability targets • Ensures that reviews of clinical variation include consideration of sustainability outcomes. |
| <p>2. The health service organisation uses its established clinical governance systems to implement evidence-based strategies to:</p> <p>a) Achieve organisational priorities for sustainability</p> <p>b) Plan for and build climate-resilience, and maximise sustainable healthcare initiatives to improve health services and infrastructure across the organisation</p> <p>c) Adapt clinical practices to reduce and mitigate the health</p> | <p>The health service organisation integrates its strategies to improve sustainability outcomes and monitor performance into its everyday business by using its clinical governance systems.</p> | <p>The health service organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies, prioritises and is aligned to climate risk targets set by the board using local data • Establishes baseline measurements for priority areas, such as the organisation's carbon footprint and carbon hotspots • Identifies committees, positions, clinical groups or leadership positions, that could facilitate measurement and reporting on performance against sustainable healthcare priorities • Adopts best practice guidelines for the management of sustainability • Implements changes to clinical practice which reduces duplication or low-value investigations and treatments |

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| service's contribution to emissions. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans for and incorporates climate risk mitigation, adaptation, and resilience strategies into existing risk management and business continuity plans. |
| 3. The health service organisation: a) Develops or adopts measures and indicators to monitor sustainability b) Integrates sustainability measures and indicators into routine clinical governance monitoring and reporting c) Uses information from monitoring its sustainability initiatives to improve the safety, appropriateness and quality of clinical practices. | <p>The health service organisation collects and analyses information on its climate risk and uses this information to improve in priority areas.</p> | <p>The health service organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agrees on measures and key performance indicators for sustainability Develops and endorses a sustainable healthcare strategy and reporting framework Includes sustainability as a standing agenda item reporting at relevant governance committees Reports publicly on sustainability performance and action taken to reduce climate risk Reports publicly on the reduction of duplicated or low-value investigations and treatments Monitors and reports on changes in sustainability outcomes over time. |
| 4. The health service organisation uses its training system to improve sustainable healthcare and the climate risk literacy of its workforce. | <p>The workforce is supported to develop the skills and knowledge to understand, measure, monitor and improve sustainability in the organisation and is supported by the organisation.</p> | <p>The health service organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides the workforce with access to training on sustainability and the effect on their local community and how to respond to climate events, including relevant disaster management frameworks Demonstrates how it supports workforce participation in training on sustainable health care Collects feedback from the workforce on training that is used to improve sustainability outcomes. |
| 5. The health service organisation supports: a) Its workforce and consumers to participate in the development and implementation of sustainability strategies b) Reports to the governing body, the workforce and consumers on | <p>The governing body, management, workforce and consumers are engaged in identifying, designing and delivering sustainability strategies that maximise opportunities to implement sustainable healthcare initiatives across the service.</p> | <p>The health service organisation, in collaboration with its workforce and consumers, amends its policies and processes to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select consumables that are ecologically friendly for use in clinical care Facilitate workforce innovation, local quality improvement and projects to improve sustainability, including unwarranted clinical variation |

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| <p>sustainability strategies.</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and deliver improvements or projects with consumer participation to improve sustainability • Publish sustainability reports tailored to the health literacy of the workforce and consumers • Provide patients with information about sustainable health care and any impact on their clinical care. |
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Glossary

The list below reflects the meanings of the words in the context of this specific document.

Adaptation – the actions taken to manage the impacts of climatic events. These impacts may be those affecting individual patients, communities, or particular populations. They may also refer to the effects on health services, infrastructure, or service delivery.

Carbon footprint – a measure of the exclusive total amount of emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) that is directly and indirectly caused by an activity or service, or that which is accumulated over the life stages of a product.

Climate resilience – is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate. Improving climate resilience involves assessing how climate change will create new, or alter current, climate-related risks, and taking steps to better cope with these risks. Addressing climate resilience involves health service organisations considering the risks they pose to the climate through greenhouse gas emissions as well as risks that climatic change poses to the health of the population and the delivery of future health services.

Climate risk literacy – the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and use climate risk related information in varying formats to enable meaningful participation in climate risk planning and action.

Sustainability – the actions that ensure future generations will have the natural resources available to live an equal, if not better, way of life as current generations.

Greenhouse gas emissions – gases (such as carbon dioxide) emitted into the Earth's atmosphere that trap heat. They let sunlight pass through the atmosphere, but prevent the heat that the sunlight brings from leaving the atmosphere.

Mitigation – efforts to cut or prevent the emission of greenhouse gases, to limit the magnitude of future warming. It can also encompass attempts to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

Resilience – the capacity for the health system to absorb stresses and maintain function in the face of external stresses imposed upon it by changes in the global climate; and the capacity to adapt, reorganise, and evolve into more desirable configurations that improve the sustainability of the system, leaving it better prepared for future climatic impacts. The system is predictive, proactive, and reactive.

System – includes the resources, policies, processes and procedures that are organised, integrated, regulated and administered to accomplish a stated goal.

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