

**AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION**  
**ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE**

# **Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Healthcare Module**

**DRAFT VERSION**

November 2023

D23-51832

# Introduction

Human health and wellbeing depends on clean air, water, food, stable shelter and a liveable environment. Since industrialisation, there has been significant degradation of the Earth's natural ecosystem and increases in greenhouse gas emissions. These are the result of human activity.<sup>2, 4, 5</sup>

Increased air and sea temperatures are leading to extreme weather events and rising sea-levels. Reducing greenhouse emissions is essential to prevent further atmospheric temperature rise and extreme weather events.<sup>2-5, 8</sup>

Australia has committed to a whole-of-economy Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>1, 5, 6</sup>

Australia has one of the best healthcare systems in the world. Australian healthcare produces 7% of total national greenhouse gas emissions. This is high when compared with international comparators such as the National Health Service in England which contributes 3% of national emissions.<sup>5</sup>

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

- Unnecessary or even harmful tests, procedures or interventions
- Unnecessary use of resources
- Poor waste management
- Uncontrolled procurement of products
- Unnecessary travel
- Unmanaged energy and water use
- Inadequate, poorly implemented and integrated or delivered public health and preventative health
- Poor use and management of medicines, devices and materials
- Ineffective design and management of facilities.<sup>1-3, 5</sup>

The health system has a responsibility to minimise its own contributions to carbon emissions and play its part in achieving Australia's Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan.<sup>5, 9</sup>

Health service organisations are taking action, which includes:

- Routine collection and monitoring of sustainability indicators
- Implementing sustainability strategies and strategic plans to build health services that are resilient and adaptable to the effects of changes in weather and disease patterns
- Developing a wide range of initiatives to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1, 6</sup>

Providing sustainable health care is a central feature in designing new health service facilities or upgrades, and in production and supply-chain management, and waste management.<sup>1, 3, 6</sup>

# Explanatory note

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. In collaboration with technical experts, health service providers and consumers, the Commission has developed a set of actions to enable organisations to build their environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

The Environmentally Sustainable and Climate Resilience Healthcare Module (the Module) is a framework of actions that use existing governance, safety and quality systems that health service organisations already have implemented. It can be applied together with any of the national safety and quality standards developed by the Commission. Implementation will vary widely across settings, as the safety and quality systems will vary, depending on the size of the organisation and the risks associated with the services being delivered.

The Module supports health service organisations to include sustainability measures and targets when setting priorities and strategies for their services, and when partnering with consumers and First Nations people 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 are dependent on other actions in national safety and quality standards, such as the actions in National Safety and Quality in Health Service Standards:<sup>5</sup>

- Clinical Governance Standard
  - Action 1.01 Governance, leadership and culture
  - Action 1.08 Measurement and quality improvement
  - Action 1.10 Risk management
  - Action 1.20 Safety and quality training
  - Action 1.27 Evidence-based care
  - Action 1.28 Variation in clinical practice and health outcomes
- Partnering with Consumers Standard
  - Action 2.11 Partnerships in healthcare governance planning, design, measurement and evaluation.

The Module aligns with the strategic work on climate change developed by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

# Module – November 2023 Draft

## 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 Module

Health service organisations integrate climate resilience and environmental sustainability into the leadership, governance, strategy, and culture of care; and strive to deliver environmentally sustainable and value-based care.

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### Action

1. The governing body:
  - a. Provides leadership to address environmental sustainability and climate resilience within the health service organisation
  - b. Ensures collaboration with consumers and stakeholders on issues and co-design of strategies for environmental sustainability and climate resilience
  - c. Sets evidence-based organisational priorities and targets, and monitors improvements in the organisation's environmental sustainability and climate resilience to meet national and jurisdictional targets
2. The health service organisation uses its governance systems to implement evidence-based strategies for:
  - a. Identifying processes, practices and services that have a high environmental impact
  - b. Redesigning processes, practices and services to reduce the environmental impact
  - c. Considering the environmental impact when making decisions about processes, practices and services
  - d. Reviewing clinical practices to identify unwarranted healthcare variation and unnecessary use of resources
3. The health service organisation:
  - a. Measures its environmental sustainability and climate resilience
  - b. Integrates measures and indicators for environmental sustainability and climate risk into routine governance monitoring and reporting processes
  - c. Uses information on environmental sustainability and climate resilience to provide value-based care

## Action

4. The health service organisation uses its training systems to provide the workforce with the skill and knowledge to:
    - a. Assess the environmental risks of clinical care and its climate impact
    - b. Implement strategies to reduce climate and environmental impacts
    - c. Use indicators of climate and environmental impact to monitor change
  
  5. The health service organisation supports:
    - a. Its workforce and consumers to participate in the development and implementation of environmental sustainability strategies and clinical change practices
    - b. Reports to the governing body, the workforce and consumers on its environmental sustainability strategies and performance
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# Glossary

The terms below reflect 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 greenhouse gases that is directly and indirectly caused by an activity or service, or that which is accumulated over the life stages of a product.

**Governance** – where leaders of a health service organisation have a responsibility to the community for continuous improvement of the safety and quality of their services, and ensure that they are patient-centred, safe and effective.

**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.

**Governing body** – a group of healthcare officials who have authority to exercise governance over a health service organisation.

**Greenhouse gas emissions** – gases (such as carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and desflurane) 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.

**Health service organisation** – a service that is responsible for implementing clinical governance, administration and financial management of a service unit or service units providing health care at the direction of the governing body.

**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.

**Module** – a framework consisting of a set of actions that health service organisations can implement to improve safety and quality. The module is designed to be implemented along with other national safety and quality standards as it relies on existing safety and quality systems, process and governance to be most effective.

**Sustainability** – consists of fulfilling the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future generations, while ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental care and social wellbeing.

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

**Value-based care** – is about achieving the best care possible for each patient while maintaining an efficient use of resources.

## References

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