

# Towards sustainable healthcare and a healthy environment



## WHO WE ARE

Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe is a non-profit member-based organisation of hospitals, healthcare systems, medical associations, local and regional authorities, academic and research institutions, environmental consultancies, and environmental and health organisations. Our membership network consists of 142 organisations in 29 European countries, 20 of which are EU Member States.

Our mission is to transform the European healthcare sector so that it reduces its environmental footprint and becomes a community anchor for sustainability and a leader in the global movement for environmental health and justice.

At HCWH Europe we achieve our goals through the following model:

- **Innovate:** Identify and pilot opportunities for healthcare to implement innovative, economical, science-based solutions to environmental health problems.
- **Scale:** Educate, develop tools, train healthcare professionals, and scale up solutions across our networks, in the health sector and the communities it serves.
- **Transform:** Aggregate the influence and purchasing power of healthcare to drive markets towards sustainability and drive policymakers to create sustainable change worldwide.

Our goal is to contribute to enhanced universal health and wellbeing by reducing the health sector's environmental footprint and by fostering health sector leadership and advocacy to protect human health from environmental harm.

## WHAT WE WANT

The healthcare sector in Europe is economically significant, representing approximately 10% of GDP in EU Member States and employing millions of people. Importantly, its activities also have a direct impact on both the environment and the health of EU citizens.

HCWH Europe therefore calls on the political leaders of the EU, Members of the European Parliament, and the future Commission to promote and support the implementation of environmentally sustainable healthcare practices that protect the health and wellbeing of patients, employees, communities, and the planet; both now and in future.

We hereby call on the EU to implement the following **15 RECOMMENDATIONS** and lead the transition towards **sustainable healthcare and a healthier environment across Europe by 2025**.

Through consultation with our members and Board, HCWH Europe strongly urges the EU's political leaders to take decisive action and support:

## Climate-smart Healthcare

In alignment with the Paris Agreement, the EU is on track to comply with its greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. We believe that the EU and its Member States, however, should commit to more ambitious climate and energy targets in order to limit temperature increases to 1.5°C and safeguard the environment and the safety and prosperity of people in Europe and worldwide.

HCWH Europe's goal is to **decarbonise the European healthcare sector** (which currently represents approximately 5% of the EU's emissions), and increase its resilience to climate change through increased climate advocacy from healthcare leaders; we call upon the EU to:

1. Ensure that climate and energy is integrated across different policy areas (particularly health) at subnational, national, and global levels in line with the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030.
2. Support an EU budget that aligns national and regional investment priorities with climate and public health goals. The healthcare sector should be included in National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and these should consider an accurate calculation of health cost savings that result from climate mitigation activities.
3. Develop a strategy that commits the EU and Member States to become carbon neutral by 2040, with increased ambition for a 65% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 (increased from the current 40%), supported by increased investment in clean, healthy, and affordable renewable energy.

## Sustainable Procurement and Circular Economy

Promoting and strengthening capacity for strategic public procurement is key to creating a more innovative, sustainable, inclusive, circular, and competitive economy in Europe. The recent EU Directives on public procurement, together with the public procurement strategy and the circular economy package, have been important steps forward, but more ambitious action and policies are needed.

HCWH Europe's goal is to **reduce the negative impacts of European healthcare procurement** upon the environment, society, and human health; we call upon the EU to:

4. Increase demand for sustainable goods and services by increasing the knowledge, awareness, and skills of procurement professionals in the healthcare sector.
5. Encourage the creation of transparent and sustainable value chains and procurement practices through increased access to information about products and services, and the availability of Green Public Procurement Criteria and tools that support the incorporation of social, environmental, and health considerations into decision-making.
6. Work with Member States to establish an EU-wide target for sustainable public procurement and advance the creation and implementation of National Action Plans.

## Safer Chemicals

The ubiquitous exposure to man-made synthetic chemicals in everyday life has increasingly become a health concern. Unfortunately, both healthcare and consumer products can contribute to hazardous exposures particularly amongst vulnerable groups, such as children and pregnant women. The growing body of evidence raises concerns about the health impacts of chronic exposures to chemical 'cocktails', even in small doses.

HCWH Europe's goal is to **reduce chemical pollution and exposure from the European healthcare sector**; we call upon the EU institutions to:

7. Ensure coherency between all EU policies and engage all stakeholders in promoting the sound management of chemicals and waste in order to reduce the risk of chemical exposure throughout their entire life cycle (particularly for vulnerable populations).
8. Take concrete actions to better protect the environment and people's health from known and presumed hazards from pesticides, endocrine disruptors, and poisoning from lead, mercury, or other toxic chemicals.
9. Foster a shift towards green chemistry and safer alternatives.

## Safer Pharma

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing health threat expected to overtake cancer as a major cause of death globally by 2050. The European Commission has developed a series of measures to address this issue, but these fall short of adequately considering the role of pharmaceutical pollution to the emergence and spread of AMR.

HCWH Europe's goal is to **reduce the presence of pharmaceuticals in the environment**; we call upon the EU to:

10. Ensure transparency and improve consistency of pharmaceutical manufacturing throughout the supply chain to prevent pharmaceutical companies from operating double standards in developing countries.
11. Set ambitious environmental quality standards and concentration limits for pharmaceuticals in the environment, particularly with regard to drinking water supplies.
12. Increase awareness amongst stakeholders about the impact of pharmaceuticals in the environment, encouraging rational prescription, proper use, safe disposal, and waste reduction.

## Sustainable Food

As a trusted authority with influential purchasing power, the healthcare sector, has a unique opportunity to develop a food system that conserves and renews natural resources and ecosystems, advances social justice and animal welfare, supports community health and wellbeing, and fulfils all current and future nutritional needs.

HCWH Europe's goal is to **increase the sustainability of food production and consumption in European healthcare**; we call upon the EU to:

13. Develop policies and practices that support the production, procurement, and provision of sustainable, nutritious foods that simultaneously reduce climate impact and protect public health.
14. Increase its ambition to prevent and reduce food waste in the healthcare sector.
15. Foster the educational role of healthcare facilities in highlighting the importance of healthy and sustainable diets, and encouraging staff and patients to change food consumption habits. This should be supported through training initiatives, financing, guidelines for healthcare providers, as well as platforms for sharing ideas, experiences, and best practice.



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