



# HOSPITAL SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE



Centre for Chronic Disease Control



WHO Collaborating Centre for  
Surveillance, Capacity building  
and Translational Research in  
Cardio-Metabolic Diseases





# NEED FOR A SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

**B**uilding sustainability into health care delivery has become an urgent issue in the face of growing challenges ranging from pandemics to the climate crisis. With increasing demand for healthcare services, it is both urgent and pertinent that sustainability is integrated into all functions and services in a healthcare facility. Integrating sustainability into a healthcare facility's operations is a journey that proceeds gradually and requires a lot of planning. Steps should ideally include developing committed teams, identifying opportunities and challenges, setting measurable goals, finding creative solutions and strategies, and tracking progress. A hospital can have multiple sustainability drivers including cost reduction, regulatory compliance, environmental stewardship, social responsibility, etc. Potential barriers to sustainability interventions include constraints in human resources, time, and finance. By understanding an organization's goals as well as potential barriers, leaders can choose appropriate strategies. For doing all this work, it is beneficial to have a committed team of staff that will focus on sustainability.

## WHAT IS A SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE?

**A sustainability committee** is a group of committed hospital staff who collectively strategise and implement environmentally sustainable initiatives at the hospital/healthcare facility to improve the health of people, communities, and the environment in which they serve.



### SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE

For this guidance document **"sustainable healthcare"** is defined as a health sector that

- **minimizes** its negative impacts on the environment and restores and improves it.
- **anticipates**, responds to, and recovers from climate-related shocks and stressors.
- **provides** ongoing healthcare to citizens and protects the health and well-being of future generations. (WHO 2020)

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**Measure**  
and report  
on the facility's  
environmental  
performance.

**Maintain**  
a record of  
sustainability  
initiatives in a  
hospital.

**Minimize** the  
environmental footprint  
of the hospital and  
address social equity and  
financial co-benefits.

**Participate** in  
training programs/  
webinars related  
to healthcare  
sustainability.

**Develop,**  
implement,  
manage  
and monitor  
sustainability  
projects.

**Organise**  
awareness-raising  
programs on  
environment and  
public health.

**Draft** and  
implement  
hospital policies  
for sustainability.

**Coordinate**  
staff education  
on methods, strategies,  
and action plans to  
reduce environmental  
footprint.

**Apply** and  
aim to qualify  
for sustainability  
awards

**Supervise**  
public relations  
and communications  
efforts on  
sustainability

# RECOMMENDED MEMBERS FOR A SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

A sustainability team should encompass all the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences required to implement sustainability interventions. Below is a list of recommended members for a sustainability committee (from HCWH Europe, 2021).



## HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATORS

Senior members of staff (e.g. CEO, Medical Director) and the managers/team leaders of the committee. They will be responsible for advocating and promoting sustainability work, and ensuring all the required systems, processes and resources are available for the work.



## OPERATIONAL STAFF

Operational staff will be responsible for developing and implementing the sustainability initiatives. They will survey and collect data on their respective work areas. They will also identify ways to make their systems more sustainable. Operational staff can be chosen for the following areas:

- ▶ Energy
- ▶ Travel
- ▶ Waste
- ▶ Water
- ▶ Procurement
- ▶ Buildings



## SUPPORT STAFF

Support staff are required to facilitate and provide supporting services for sustainability

interventions. *Examples are as follows:*

**Finance:** A finance representative on the sustainability committee is essential as all interventions will require financial resources. They will have to collect expenditure data for water, energy, waste, procurement etc., conduct cost-benefit analysis for potential interventions, and source funds for projects.

**Medical professionals (physicians, clinical staff):** Medical professionals will have to work with the sustainability committee to provide on-ground information on medical service provision and help ideate ways to make it more sustainable. They should also be advocates of environmental health to the hospital and community.

**Information and Technology:** The IT staff must help to make the IT equipment more environmentally friendly in terms of energy use.

**Communications:** Communications representatives should help in disseminating information about hospital sustainability principles and interventions internally and externally.

**Human Resources:** The HR team can help in organizing the training programs on sustainability for the committee as well as wider hospital staff. They should also work on awareness raising and behavior change among the staff.

*Hospitals are different with respect to services, governance structures, and resources, so the above list can be used as a guide to create a customised committee based on each hospital's capacity and organizational structure.*

(KARLINER & GUENTHER, 2011)

# RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES FOR A SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

The sustainability committee can focus on implementing initiatives in the following 10 pillars

‣ **Leadership:** Ensure environmental health, safety and sustainability are key organizational priorities- through hospital policies, resource allocation, staff education, and engaging with community and policy makers.

‣ **Energy:** Implement energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy generation- through conducting energy audits, and having energy conservation and efficiency programs.

‣ **Waste:** Reduce, treat, and safely dispose of healthcare waste and protect public health by preventing exposure of public to toxic chemicals.

‣ **Water:** Reduce water consumption and treat wastewater- through having a "net zero water use" system, having routine monitoring of water fixtures, landscaping for water conservation, rainwater harvesting, and decentralized wastewater treatment.

‣ **Food:** Purchase and/or grow sustainably grown, local healthy food and foster healthy eating habits among staff and patients.

‣ **Transport:** Improve transport strategies for patients and staff- encouraging public transport, carpooling, bicycles where possible, converting hospital vehicle fleet to electric vehicles.

‣ **Procurement:** Buy safer and more sustainable products and materials, and source from socially and environmentally responsible vendors and supply chains. Build demand for sustainable packaging and extended producer responsibility to take back end -of- lifecycle products.

‣ **Pharmaceuticals:** Safely manage and dispose pharmaceuticals, reduce over-prescription, and promote manufacture take-back.

‣ **Chemicals:** Substitute harmful chemicals with safer alternatives- through having a chemicals policy, substituting mercury, Polyvinyl chloride, Bisphenol A etc. with safer chemicals.

‣ **Buildings:** Support green and healthy hospital design and construction, aspire to carbon neutral building operation, design with local materials in accordance to community contexts, and avoid harmful building materials.

## FREQUENCY OF MEETING

It is recommended that the sustainability committee meet once a month or at least once a quarter in the year to ensure the work is implemented and monitored regularly.

## TARGETS/GOALS

Examples of targets that the committee can set include:

Net Zero  
by 2050

Plastic-free/  
Zero-Waste  
Hospital

Only local and  
seasonal food  
served



# BENEFITS OF HAVING A SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

## POSITIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES

Sustainability interventions almost always have health co-benefits. Working on climate change mitigation and adaptation protects human health from extreme weather events and disease burdens. Working on sustainable transportation reduces air pollution and promotes healthier lifestyles, sustainable food production promotes healthy consumption, working on safer pharmaceutical use prevents anti-microbial resistance etc.

## SAFE AND HYGIENIC ENVIRONMENTS

Using safer chemicals and building materials in the hospitals provides a safer built environment for staff and patients.

## COST-SAVINGS

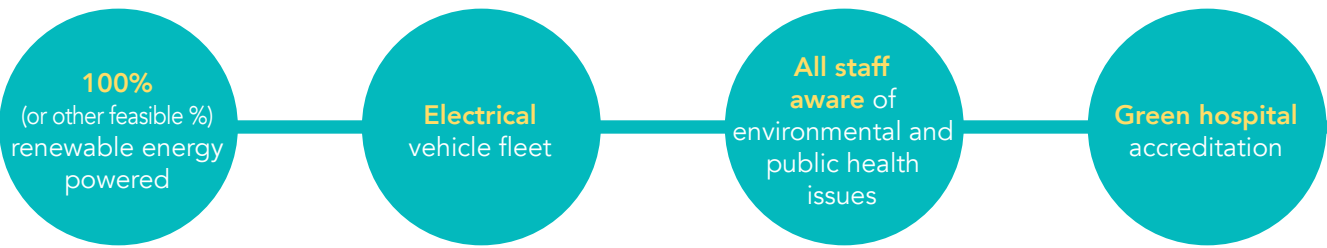
On-site renewable energy development may have high capital costs but over time gives good returns and savings in expenditure. Similarly, being self-sufficient in terms of water use, food production etc. can give cost benefits.

## SOCIAL BENEFITS

Building demand aggregation for goods and services that are manufactured and delivered through supply chains that ensure a just, safe and gender-neutral working environment.

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Ensuring the wider ecosystems are protected and preserved will help the health of all living beings.



**100%**  
(or other feasible %)  
renewable energy  
powered

**Electrical**  
vehicle fleet

**All staff**  
aware of  
environmental and  
public health  
issues

**Green hospital**  
accreditation



## REFERENCES

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Karliner, J. & Guenther, R. A comprehensive environmental health agenda for hospitals and health systems around the world, Global Green and Healthy Hospitals, Healthcare Without Harm; 2011