

How to get started as a health care sustainability physician champion



As trusted leaders, physicians can be champions of environmentally responsible health care – but how do you get started? Here are some tips and resources to help you begin your journey as a health care sustainability champion.

Get educated, then educate others

GET EDUCATED

- Visit the [Health Care Without Harm](#) and [Practice Greenhealth](#) websites to learn about health care's environmental impact and opportunities to move toward [climate-smart](#), environmentally responsible health care.
- Visit the Physician Network [resource site](#).
- Plan to attend the many physician-led, CME-eligible sessions at [CleanMed](#), the premier conference for health care sustainability leaders.
- Learn about the [business case](#) for health sector sustainability, including the potential costs savings highlighted in [this report](#).
- Learn about the [public health impacts](#) of climate change and [environmental health](#), as well as the health benefits of practicing [sustainability in your home](#), medical practice, and community.
- Read policy statements from the [American College of Physicians](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), and [American College of Emergency Physicians](#) calling on physicians to reduce the environmental impact of health care facilities.
- Check out the American College of Physicians' [climate change toolkit](#) and the American Society of Anesthesiologists' [environmental sustainability](#) resources, and see what's available in your own medical society.

EDUCATE OTHERS

- Educate your colleagues about how to reduce environmental impact, with a focus on specific opportunities in your hospital.
- Present at grand rounds or a department meeting.
- Invite an expert speaker from Health Care Without Harm, Practice Greenhealth, or the Physician Network Speakers Bureau.
- Write a blog or article for your hospital newsletter.
- Share your knowledge on [social media](#).
- Talk to your patients about how [climate impacts their health](#) and how they can [reduce environmental exposures](#).

Conduct an internal sustainability assessment

- Find out if your hospital is a member of Practice Greenhealth.
 - If your hospital is a member, [request access](#) to members-only resources and get connected to your member engagement manager.
 - If your hospital isn't a member, learn more about the benefits of [Practice Greenhealth membership](#).
- Conduct an [assessment of current sustainability practices](#) in your hospital.
 - Find out what programs are already in place and where new opportunities exist.
 - Does your hospital or health system have a green team or sustainability manager?
- Get key stakeholders involved, including environmental services, food services, pharmacy, purchasing, facilities, nursing, and operating room staff.
- What does your leadership care about?
 - Are your hospital's operations aligned with its mission statement?
 - What are your hospital's current priorities?
- You likely aren't alone in your interest, so ask around and find your allies.

Conduct an external sustainability assessment

- Are other hospitals in your community and state Practice Greenhealth members? Have they made a commitment to sustainability?
- Has your community made a commitment to renewable energy, reducing waste, or greenhouse gas emission reduction?
- What are the health and environmental issues in your community? Read your hospital's [community benefit report](#) to see if the top health needs are related to environmental determinants of health.
- What are the climate risks in your community? Is your hospital prepared for severe weather events? [Learn how extreme weather can impact health care delivery](#).

Start a sustainability program at your hospital or health system

- Use Practice Greenhealth's [engaged leadership toolkit](#) to develop a strategy for talking to your hospital's leaders about sustainability.
- Be very clear about what you're asking for, such as joining Practice Greenhealth, starting or leading a green team, creating a recycling program, making a public commitment to climate action, starting a greening the OR program, etc.
- Who are you going to ask and how? This might include a letter, email, or in-person meeting with administrators or the board of directors.
- Know your audience and what is important to them, and customize your presentation accordingly. Highlight relevant facts, data, and information.
- Focus on solutions and the benefits of sustainability to your hospital, health system, patients, and community.
- Identify clear next steps and have a follow-up plan.

CONNECT WITH THE HEALTH CARE'S SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNITY

Join the Health Care Without Harm [Physician Network](#) and the Physicians for a Sustainable Future [Facebook group](#) to learn from others and share ideas.