

# How to get started as a health care sustainability champion



The first and most important step to becoming a sustainability champion is to join the [Nurses Climate Challenge](#), sponsored by Health Care Without Harm and the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, and connect with nurses around the world committed to reducing the environmental footprint of the health care sector.

As the most trusted professionals in the United States, nurses can be valuable advocates of environmentally responsible health care. Here are some tips and resources to help begin your journey as a health care sustainability champion.

## Become informed, then educate others

Learn about the relationship between climate and health:

- 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 [Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments](#) website to learn how nurses can promote environmentally safe and healthy clinical care.
- Attend the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments' Nursing Summit on Environmental Health and the many nurse-led, continuing education-eligible sessions at [CleanMed](#), the premier conference for health care sustainability leaders.
- Learn about the [business case](#) for health sector sustainability, including potential cost savings highlighted in this [Commonwealth Fund report](#).
- Review the [public health impacts of climate change](#) and [environmental health](#), as well as the health benefits of [sustainability in your home](#), workplace, and community.

- Read policy statements from the [International Council of Nurses](#) and the [American Academy of Nursing](#) calling on nurses to reduce the environmental impact of health care facilities and prepare to care for patients experiencing the health impacts of climate change.

Educate others:

- Utilize the [free resources](#) on the Nurses Climate Challenge to educate and engage your colleagues.
- Talk with your colleagues about how to reduce environmental impacts in your school, clinic, or hospital.
- Present at grand rounds or a staff meeting.
- Invite an expert speaker from Health Care Without Harm, Practice Greenhealth, or Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments.
- Write a blog or article for your hospital or nursing association newsletter.
- Share your knowledge on [social media](#).
- Talk to your patients about how the environment impacts their health and how they can reduce environmental exposures.

## Conduct an internal sustainability assessment

- You likely aren't alone in your interest, so ask around and find your allies. Join the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environment's practice work group to connect with nurses working to achieve environmentally safe and healthy practices.
  - » If you are a nurse climate champion, reach out to the Nurses Climate Challenge so we can connect you with fellow champions and sustainability leaders in your area.
- 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?
- What does your leadership care about?
  - » What are your hospital's current priorities?
  - » Are your hospital's operations aligned with its mission statement?
- Get stakeholders involved, including environmental services, food services, pharmacy, medicine, purchasing, facilities, and operating room staff.

## Conduct an external sustainability assessment

- Are other hospitals in your region Practice Greenhealth members? Have they made a commitment to sustainability?
- Has your community made a commitment to using renewable energy or reducing waste or greenhouse gas emissions?
- 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 clear about what you're asking for, such as joining Practice Greenhealth, starting or leading a sustainability team, creating a recycling program, making a public commitment to climate action, etc.
- Determine who you are going to ask and how. This might include a letter, email, or in-person meeting with administrators.
- Know your audience and what is important to them and customize your presentation accordingly. Highlight relevant facts, data, and information. Consider including a story that highlights local environmental health impacts on your patients.
- Focus on solutions and the benefits of sustainability to your hospital, health system, patients, and community.
- Identify clear next steps and have a plan to follow up with leadership.