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Sustainability in healthcare: An urgent responsibility

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Sustainability in healthcare is an essential part of responsible business practices. The World Health Organization has declared climate change the "single biggest health threat affecting humanity." More than 70 healthcare systems representing more than 14,000 hospitals and healthcare facilities from 25 countries, joined the U.N.'s Race to Zero[1] to become carbon-neutral by 2050. In the U.S., more than 19% of hospitals have committed to the White House Health Sector Climate pledge.[2]

This figure challenges us to rethink not only how we deliver care, but also how our systems interact with the environment. The truth is human health and environmental health are intertwined and are inseparable reflections of the choices we make today.

The effects of climate change, from worsening air quality to increased heat-related illnesses, are already being felt by our patients and communities. And yet, healthcare itself plays a contributing role, through energy-intensive operations, inefficient workflows and resource-heavy devices. This sobering reality calls for a fundamental shift not just to do better for the planet, but to improve patient outcomes, advance health equity and support the sustainability of our systems both environmentally and operationally.

Shaping the future through innovation

Solutions to these challenges must start with responsible innovation. As a purpose-driven health technology company, we're very conscious of our responsibility toward society and of the need to continue to embed sustainability ever deeper in the way we do business—in our own

operations and beyond, together with our partners. Driving global change, with a specific focus on access to care, circular economy and climate action. When it comes to making the world healthier and more sustainable, there's simply no time to waste.

Our areas of focus are Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 12, 13 and 17. To underpin this, we've adopted a number of policies and methodologies[3] to guide our work. We're also committed to working with our customers and suppliers to reduce carbon dioxide emissions across our value chain. This includes when customers use our products, and when we make and supply them. We're committed to carbon footprint reduction based on a science-based targets[4] approach.

In 2023, Philips became the first health technology company to have its entire value-chain CO2 emissions reduction targets approved by the Science-Based Targets Initiative (SBTi). Extending Philips' carbon-reduction goals to cover scopes 1, 2 and 3. Scope 3 is very important because responsible sourcing of goods and services has a positive impact on the healthcare value chain. It also means that the environmental footprint made by Philips customers becomes smaller.

We're making progress toward meeting our goals. For example, we've been carbon-neutral in our operations since 2020. All our sites are powered by 100% renewable electricity sources. This is largely driven by multiple Power Purchase Agreements securing the supply of renewable electricity from locations such as the Los Mirasoles Wind Farm in the U.S. and Windpark Krammer and Bouwdokken in the Netherlands. For all remaining electricity demand, we obtain unbundled Energy Attribute Certificates. Details regarding attributes per country are available through RE100.

We've also asked many of our biggest suppliers, including manufacturing and transportation suppliers, to report on how they're doing on climate change as a part of the Carbon Disclosure Project Supply Chain program. In 2021, we're committed to making our Supplier Sustainability Program stronger. We want at least 50% of our suppliers to agree to science-based goals to reduce CO2 emissions by 2025. By the end of 2023, 46% of our suppliers—based on spend—had committed to such targets.

We're also using technology to adapt to the challenge of helium scarcity and to make MRIs more accessible to future generations. A non-renewable resource, helium prices have increased in recent years for most users due to its scarcity. MRI scanners are the largest consumers of helium in the world,[5] and this valuable element can be lost unexpectedly and quickly during a conventional MRI system quench. Therefore, responsible management of the resource has been a trend over the last few years in the healthcare industry.

Philips invented helium-free operations in MRI with our BlueSeal product. Since its launch in 2018, we've installed more than 1,500 BlueSeal systems globally in wide-ranging settings, including the world's first helium-free mobile MRI units.[5] Philips' BlueSeal magnets use highly efficient micro-cooling technology that requires only a negligible amount of liquid helium for cooling. And with artificial intelligence (AI) applications seamlessly integrated into our latest 1.5 trillion BlueSeal scanner, we've now applied AI to every aspect of the MRI workflow—from patient set-up and high-resolution image capture to quantitative data extraction, advanced diagnostics and reporting. With this latest innovation, we continue our commitment to deliver wider access to quality MRI to more patients across multiple settings.[5]

Partnerships that drive impact

Meaningful change doesn't happen in isolation. It takes collaboration. One standout example of this is our collaboration with leading sustainability experts at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. We collaborated on a life-cycle assessment project[6] to measure and mitigate emissions associated with an entire radiology department. The results showed that Vanderbilt's current diagnostic radiology unit produced 4,600 tons of CO2e over 10 years. This was mostly due to emissions from its MR imaging suite (48%) and CT imaging suite (24%). Crucial mitigation recommendations for radiology departments included accelerating digitization, embracing circularity and changing to renewable energy sourcing. Health technology companies should design for less energy, use circular design principles and make smart image storage.

Similarly, our collaboration with Jackson Health System exemplifies sustainability in action.[7] Jackson has significantly reduced its carbon footprint by transitioning to our patient monitoring solutions. This included cutting down on paper consumption and eliminating disposable batteries. It's a clear reminder that sustainability delivers tangible value alongside measurable environmental impact.

Engaging the ecosystem to achieve broader change

One of the most heartening aspects of driving sustainability in healthcare is seeing an entire ecosystem come together to tackle these challenges. In the U.S., Philips proudly participates in the Vizient Environmental Sustainability Task Force and is a member of the Collaborative for Healthcare Action to Reduce MedTech Emissions.[8] Both initiatives allow us to pool insights, share best practices and drive sectorwide change. When healthcare systems, suppliers and thought leaders join forces, we amplify our collective ability to deliver results.

This isn't just about better technology or greener buildings; it's about creating healthcare systems that serve everyone,

equitably and sustainably. By designing solutions that reduce emissions, minimize waste and expand access to care, we're taking crucial steps toward healthcare that supports populations instead of adding to their vulnerabilities.

Shaping a new, sustainable standard of care

For years, sustainability was often seen as a fringe effort—something "nice to have" but separate from core healthcare objectives. Today, that mindset has shifted. Younger healthcare workers are demanding workplaces that match their beliefs. They want to work in places that care about the environment and provide excellent patient care. For hospitals already grappling with workforce shortages, addressing these priorities is increasingly essential to both attracting and retaining top talent.

Sustainability isn't just about preserving the planet—it's about building healthcare systems that last. When we improve efficiency and reduce costs through responsible business practices, those savings can be channeled back into expanding care, deploying new services and reaching underserved populations. Take Boston Medical Center,[9] for example, which redirected energy savings from its sustainability redesign into expanding behavioral health services. It's a model for how green initiatives can also be life-changing initiatives.

A call to act together

Achieving sustainable healthcare requires collective will. It requires us all to go beyond short-term fixes and instead embed sustainability into every facet of healthcare, from supply-chain decisions to clinical operations. This is why Philips is committed to not just delivering sustainable solutions but co-creating them with like-minded partners. Our goal is to leave a legacy of care that extends beyond individual patients, touching entire communities and treasuring the planet we share.

The time to act is now. By integrating sustainability into your hospital's long-term strategies, not as an add-on but as a driver of improvement, healthcare leaders can address environmental challenges while improving operational excellence. Together, we can create a healthier future—one where care for people and care for the planet seamlessly coexist.

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