

10 Steps for a **GREENER**

Sexual Health and HIV Clinic



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INTRODUCTION

The climate crisis is a health crisis.

Climate change is causing harm to human health and wellbeing and can compromise our ability to deliver quality healthcare. Equally, the way in which we provide healthcare contributes to climate change. Recognising these risks, the NHS was the first national health system to commit to net zero carbon emissions. We must change the way we work to reduce harm to our patients and our planet.

This toolkit is designed to spark change within your HIV/Sexual Health service. We acknowledge each clinic works differently and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. However, we hope that whatever your role and wherever you work, within this range of examples of good practice your team can find something to apply and perhaps this can stimulate other ideas too.

Meaningful change cannot happen alone. For the best results, we recommend working on adopting or adapting these initiatives as a team, ensuring all voices are heard, including those of our patients. Engaging with your organisation and its sustainability leads and identifying relevant local policies is likely to improve your chances of making change happen in your local area.

The overall goal is to minimise the impact of healthcare on the environment whilst maintaining or improving patient care. Changes designed for improved environmental sustainability often go hand in hand with beneficial financial and social outcomes.

Sustainable healthcare is a developing field and it is anticipated that further resources and exemplars will become available over time. We would encourage you to evaluate and share any initiatives that you implement to enable others to make positive changes towards a greener future.

The BASHH BHIVA Sustainable Healthcare Special Interest Group
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Communication and Engagement

Improving awareness of the impact that healthcare has on the environment is a vital step towards ensuring engagement from patients and colleagues and embedding change.

Leadership

- Choose a sustainability lead within your department, ideally with time built into their job plan to support positive green actions
- Create/join a local network of sustainability leads and champions in your region

Some courses available to improve your knowledge on sustainable healthcare:

[Courses | Centre for Sustainable Healthcare](#)
[Healthcare - The Carbon Literacy Project](#)

Education and training

- Ensure team members have sustainable healthcare education and training
- Liaise with the BASHH BHIVA sustainable healthcare special interest group about delivery of an educational presentation for your team

Free e-learning for health module available for all staff:

[Environmentally Sustainable Healthcare - e-learning for healthcare \(e-lfh.org.uk\)](http://e-learning-for-healthcare.e-lfh.org.uk)

Engage with patients

- As trusted professionals you can raise awareness of climate change as a health issue, listen to patients' concerns and provide guidance to safeguard their health. This could be through electronic posters in your waiting room or discussions during consultations.

Resources available to support this:

[How to communicate about climate change with patients | The BMJ](#)
[Communicating on climate change and health: Toolkit for health professionals](#)
[Posters | For A Greener NHS | Campaign Resource Centre \(dhsc.gov.uk\)](#)



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Patient and Staff Travel

According to [Greener NHS » Delivering a net zero NHS](#), staff in NHS, patients and visitors account for roughly 3.5% of road traffic in England every day. Reviewing the need for these journeys and how they are made can have a significant impact on carbon emissions and air pollution levels.

Actions you can take (also see step 9. Engagement with your organisation)

Patient Journeys

- Encourage active or public transport, if possible, for those attending your service
- Base services in a community setting, closer to the patient's home or place or work
- Work collaboratively with GPs and other service providers so that some care can be accessed there e.g. dropping off tests, phlebotomy services
- Encourage use of online and postal services for testing and/or medication, if available and convenient for the patient
- Coordinate appointments to minimise unnecessary patient journeys

Staff Journeys

- Encourage active travel, public transport or car sharing
- Facilitate home working, if appropriate
- Facilitate working longer shifts over fewer days
- For those attending meetings or conferences, consider online attendance if appropriate
- Where travel in person is needed, consider public transport and avoid non-essential flights

Further information about the benefits of active travel and reduction of air pollution:

- [Cycling and walking can help reduce physical inactivity and air pollution, save lives and mitigate climate change \(who.int\)](#)
- [4471.pdf \(sustrans.org.uk\)](#)
- [E-bikes take a Sheffield GP Practice by storm – Greener Practice](#)
- [The journey to net-zero: Sustainable commuting in the NHS - Mobilityways](#)
- <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/every-breath-we-take-lifelong-impact-air-pollution>



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Streamlined Patient Pathways

Reviewing patient pathways to minimise unnecessary appointments, interventions and monitoring can reduce the use of resources, minimising carbon emissions and waste production. In addition, it can positively impact patient satisfaction and clinical efficiency whilst minimising hospital travel and save costs for both patients and healthcare facilities.

Actions you can take

HIV services

- Create a stable HIV patient pathway and minimise the frequency of appointments and monitoring
- Review the frequency of follow-up appointments required for other clinical scenarios e.g. following antiretroviral switch
- Review whether all tests in order sets are required e.g. baseline tests, CD4 counts, FBC
- Clarify with colleagues in primary care who is responsible for monitoring e.g. lipids, HBA1C. Consider involving GP champions for this
- Ensure staff check which tests have been performed elsewhere recently before ordering blood tests, for example by reviewing local care records

Further information on streamlining pathways in HIV services:

- [SusQI Report - A Novel Care Pathway for Stable HIV Patients.pdf](#)
- [Impact of omission of routine blood monitoring of stable patients living with HIV during the coronavirus pandemic - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
- [P050 Excess baseline investigation of patients newly diagnosed with HIV, an opportunity for decarbonising sexual health | Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)

STI services

- Consider streamlining pathways and employing digital pathways such as smart phone applications for PrEP, to reduce clinic visits and patient travel, always being mindful not to disadvantage certain communities and maintain patient choice.
- Check whether the investigations required have been performed recently elsewhere before ordering e.g. renal function in PrEP patient may have been tested with the GP
- Consider pooled rectal, urine and pharyngeal NAAT samples (3 in 1) tests for asymptomatic MSM to reduce plastic tubes use and laboratory work, as per guidelines¹

Further information on streamlining pathways in STI services:

- [Pilot evaluation of PrEP EmERGE - A novel digital health innovation designed to support sexual health clinics and HIV-PrEP users - PubMed](#)

¹ https://www.bashh.org/_userfiles/pages/files/gc_guideline_2025_final.pdf



Reduction or Re-use of Medical Equipment

Two thirds of the carbon emissions from healthcare are related to medicines, medical equipment and other supply chain issues¹ so reducing unnecessary use is an important focus for improving the sustainability of healthcare. Adopting re-usable items rather than single use options is another way to minimise the environmental impact of care²

Actions you can take

Reduce

- Review the use of gloves in your service to ensure they are only worn when required
- Consider use of other items e.g. plastic gowns, content of sterile equipment sets

Further information about reducing glove usage:

- [‘Gloves are off’](#)
- [Reducing non-sterile glove use in a sexual health and HIV department: A quality improvement project to address clinical practices - Laurie Smith, Amanda Clarke, Gillian Dean, 2025](#)
- [Glove Awareness Week Resources | Royal College of Nursing](#)

Review single use items in your service and investigate re-usable options, for example:

- Vagina specula, tourniquets, drinking cups, sample bags, privacy curtains, cryotherapy cannisters, examination table covers

Further information about re-usable vaginal specula:

- [Improving sustainability in sexual health: A pilot project reintroducing reusable stainless steel vaginal specula at a sexual health clinic - PubMed](#)
- [bmj-2023-075779.full.pdf](#)

Review the need for sterilisation of items

- Discuss with your infection control and decontamination colleagues to agree the best approach

Further information about reducing sterilisation:

- [Assessing the financial and environmental impact of sending phlebotomy trays for unnecessary external steam sterilisation, sexual health team | Sustainable Healthcare Networks Hub](#)

Look at re-using other items such as:

- Staff uniforms, plastic sample bags, sample trays
- **Further information about reusing plastic sample bags:**
- [Q30 - BASHH Annual Conference 2024, Bournemouth, UK, June 17–19 2024](#)

1. B1728-delivering-a-net-zero-nhs-july-2022.pdf

2. The impact of switching from single-use to reusable healthcare products: a transparency checklist and systematic review of life-cycle assessments - PubMed



Procurement and Packaging

You can embed sustainability in procurement by prioritising local, ethical, and fair-trade suppliers, while considering the environmental and community impacts of purchasing decisions. Sustainable procurement addresses inequalities by prioritising social value in business operations and benefits the local environment.

Actions you can take

Optimise stock management

- Review stock rotation and ordering practices to ensure items do not go out of date

Review the delivery of stock

- Group goods together for transport
- Consider low carbon transport options for stock delivery between sites

Example of low carbon delivery options

[Pedal power drives improved service and greener deliveries - Oxford University Hospitals](#)

Minimise unnecessary packaging

- Choose options with less packaging when procuring items
- Review packaging in online testing kits

Further information and examples about minimising packaging in online testing

[028 - BASHH Annual Conference 2024, Bournemouth, UK, June 17–19 2024](#)

Procure low carbon options

- Avoid cryotherapy gases with a high greenhouse gas effect e.g. norfluane
- Choose smaller syringes with less plastic, if feasible
- Investigate whether you can utilise smaller blood bottles

Further information and examples about adopting lower carbon options:

[Reducing routine inpatient blood testing | The BMJ](#)

[Microsoft Word - Syringe Case Study - Edit - 24Sept13 \(sustainablehealthcare.org.uk\)](#)

[NHS Supply Chain Sustainability](#)



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Use of Digital Technology

The prudent use of online and digital technology can minimise the use of paper and other resources. However, be mindful of digital poverty and other barriers when implementing.

Actions you can take

Digital communication with patients

- Consider offering virtual (phone or video) instead of face-to-face appointments to minimise patient and staff journeys
- Transition to electronic communication for interactions with patients and staff members using only paper when requested
- Encourage the use of the NHS App to view medical records
- Provide QR codes and links to patient information leaflets. Distribute paper leaflets only upon request

Digital communication with staff

- Use video conferencing and meetings to minimise travel
- Avoid printing out documents for meetings and ensure electronic access instead. If printing is necessary, use recycled paper, widen margins and print double-sided
- Ensure the prudent use of emails and avoid cc and bcc'ing unnecessarily
- Stop sending emails of acknowledgement if appropriate
- Encourage staff to discuss in person rather than email if in the same place of work
- Access journals and articles online, and request that paper copies are not sent to you or your department

Adopt electronic health records

- Utilize electronic patient notes and prescribing systems
- Implement a system for electronic test requests
- Reduce or eliminate paper results; use them only when specifically requested

Encourage staff to reduce electricity usage

- Encourage staff to switch off computers, lights and other equipment. Consider labelling lights and equipment with "switch off when not in use"



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Prevention and Healthier Living

Lifestyle medicine

Supporting people to create and sustain lifestyle changes offers an opportunity for empowerment and improving health and wellbeing.

Lifestyle medicine can improve, reverse and prevent ill health, reducing the need for medical intervention which benefits the individual and reduces pressure on health services.



Social prescribing

Social prescribing can offer sustainable long-term health benefits without the side effects (economic, environmental and physiological) of pharmaceuticals.

Realistic medicine empowering individuals' decision making

Realistic medicine is an approach adopted by NHS Scotland to reduce harm, waste and unwarranted variation. It puts individuals, families and communities at the centre of treatment, with meaningful discussions about options and shared decision making, empowering individuals while reducing harm and waste (see below for more information).

Preventative healthcare

Preventative healthcare that reduces illness or unwanted conditions occurring is cost effective and uses significantly less resources than treating them once acquired.

Actions you can take:

- Prioritise preventative medicine e.g. access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), vaccines, contraception, treatment as prevention (TasP), cervical screening
- Encourage and support lifestyle changes e.g. through motivational interviewing or lifestyle coaching
- Facilitate access to social prescribing and peer support
- Embed realistic medicine in practice

Further information about lifestyle and realistic medicine:

[Realistic Medicine – Shared decision making, reducing harm, waste and tackling unwarranted variation](#)
[What is Lifestyle Medicine? - Find Out From British Society of Lifestyle Medicine](#)



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Appropriate Waste Management Streams

The choices we make about how we dispose of waste can have up to a 50-fold impact on a carbon footprint¹. While it is more effective to avoid and reduce waste, appropriate waste management lowers costs, keeps our staff and patients safe and reduces the detrimental impact we have on the environment.

Actions you can take

Educate and engage staff

- Set up a multidisciplinary team and explore if any team members want to be 'waste champions'
- Put up educational posters around the department to support appropriate disposal of items
- Include waste management in induction sessions

Review bin availability

- Consider doing a waste audit or 'bin register'
- Consider the spaces in your clinics e.g. which bins are in clinical vs non-clinical areas. Could this be optimised?
- Avoid ordering new bins and consider swapping bins within the department or neighbouring departments, where appropriate
- Talk to the cleaners and the porters. Ask them which bins are emptied more frequently, and which are rarely used. Get them on-board to ensure the correct bags are in the correct bins

Ensure appropriate streaming of waste

- Liaise with your Infection control team to clarify what needs to be in infectious vs non-infectious clinical waste
- Explore options for disposal of other types of waste e.g. food waste by composting in the hospital grounds

Encourage re-using or recycling other items :

- Look at exchange programs of unwanted items of furniture or equipment
- Explore other recyclable items e.g. batteries, pens, printer cartridges

Further information and examples on waste streaming and recycling

[Ellie's Fund - Recycling | YBTC](#)

¹ [The carbon footprint of waste streams in a UK hospital - ScienceDirect](#)



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Engagement with your Organisation

Many changes required to minimise our environmental impact are outside of the direct control of individuals working in HIV and sexual health services. To deliver these changes, you may need to work with your wider organisation. It is important to read your organisation's green plan, reach out to your sustainability officer and find out what is already in place or in progress.

Actions you can encourage your organisation to take:

Encourage active travel

- Ensure access to showers, changing rooms and lockers at work
- Provide secure and accessible cycle storage and consider supplying clamps and padlocks
- Provide access to pay-as-you-go bikes or scooters
- Provide e-bike charging points
- Offer salary sacrifice cycle to work schemes
- Incentivise active travel for staff

Encourage electric vehicle usage

- Provide adequate e-vehicle charging points
- Offer salary sacrifice schemes for electric vehicles
- Switch to electric hospital fleet
- Use electric vehicles for couriers and transportation

Minimise the impact of own vehicle usage

- Provide adequate car parking facilities for those who have no sustainable alternative to prevent long queues and engines idling
- Promote car share schemes
- Explore options for park and ride schemes

Encourage public transport

- Incentivise use of public transport or arrange for discounted rates on public transport
- Improve public transport links to hospital sites



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Review energy usage

- Decarbonise energy sources
- Use low energy lighting options/motion sensor lighting
- Implement automatic switch-off of non-essential computers outside of office hours
- Minimise the use of screen savers
- Use energy efficient monitors and computers

Review estates

- Undertake an environmental audit of the estates used by the service
- Insulate buildings adequately
- Undertake temperature audit to avoid over-heating or over-cooling

Encourage staff engagement

- Introduce mandatory training on sustainable healthcare including the proper use of PPE
- Ensure plant-based food options on hospital sites for staff and patients
- Adopt a green reward scheme
- Provide psychological support for climate related anxiety
- Encourage and support staff to take positive action
- Celebrate success!



Resilience to Climate Change

Whilst the changes included in this toolkit will go some way to minimising the environmental impact of healthcare in the future, we are already starting to experience consequences of climate change such as heatwaves and flooding. It is therefore important that we plan for potential disruption to the care we deliver and try to mitigate any impact on patients.

Speak to patients about looking after themselves in extreme weather events, for example, staying indoors during heatwaves and ensuring they have enough supply of medicines during floods.

Actions you can take

You may wish to develop a contingency plan for climate hazard events, such as flooding and extremes of heat. For example, plan how your service would deal with:

- Damage to your clinic buildings
- Disruption of transport networks meaning staff and/or patients are unable to travel to your clinic site
- Systemic IT failures
- Potential supply chain problems

Further information for patients on resilience:

[Patients Landing Keep Yourself Safe – Our Health. Our Planet](#)

And lastly, GOOD LUCK!

One small action for an individual, one giant leap for the environment.
For climate change, small can be big¹

1. [United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)

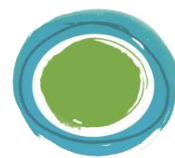
Please share your ideas, comments, successes and other examples with the sustainable healthcare SIG: contact the co-chairs Mindy & Rachel by emailing amanda.clarke16@nhs.net or rachel.drayton@wales.nhs.uk



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