



Debunking climate myths **AND EMPOWERING CLIMATE ACTION**

A communications guide for
healthcare professionals



INTRODUCTION

As a healthcare professional, you have a powerful trusted voice that you can use to advocate change in healthcare settings and beyond, to drive action toward a more sustainable future.

However, climate change and climate action are complex topics that can evoke strong emotions. Some people may be unaware of how important climate action is to protect human health or express doubt or scepticism about climate change.

That's why this practical guide provides you with **key talking points** for both discussing climate change and health, as well as countering myths or doubts in your hospital or community about the importance of taking immediate climate action in Europe.



Your voice can help empower colleagues, managers, and community members to get involved in the collective global effort to address and mitigate climate change.





THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A HEALTH CRISIS

It starts with this: climate change is the largest public health threat of the 21st century. It jeopardises the progress made in public health over the past five decades, destabilising the foundations of health systems and affecting community wellbeing. Whether it's extreme heat, vector-borne diseases, or flash floods, extreme weather events put pressure on already-overburdened healthcare systems. People - particularly those who are more vulnerable - bear the brunt of a changing climate. This is why voices from across the scientific and health communities are calling for us to create a future that safeguards both our health and our planet.

TALKING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH

- **You don't need to be a climate expert.** Climate change affects us all, and your concern for human and planetary health is more than enough to justify using your voice to speak up for climate action.
- **Get comfortable with the basics.** A vast array of resources are available to get informed about the ongoing impacts of climate change, including on [HCWH Europe's website](#).
- **You don't need to explain all the scientific details.** You can talk about what is already happening, and what you see in your work and daily life, such as extreme weather events, air pollution, rising temperatures, and their impacts on hospitals, human health, and your community,
- **Focus on the positives.** There are already many existing solutions that can be implemented to address and mitigate the impacts of climate change, such as powering healthcare with 100% clean, renewable electricity, providing healthy, sustainably grown food, and implementing circular healthcare and sustainable healthcare waste management.¹

COUNTERING MYTHS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND CLIMATE ACTION

MYTH 1: “Climate change does not affect me in Europe.”

Europe is heating up faster than any other continent in the world. Extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, storms, and flooding, are occurring more often and with more severity, threatening health, agriculture, buildings, and biodiversity.¹ Rising temperatures have also led to the spread of certain vector-borne diseases in Europe.

At the same time, Europe contributes significantly to climate change. Countries in the European Union produced over 17% of cumulative carbon dioxide emissions globally since the start of the Industrial Revolution.¹ It is estimated that the EU makes up 12% of the global healthcare climate footprint, surpassed only by China and the USA.¹ We are part of the problem - and must be part of the solution.

MYTH 2: “There is nothing I can do to stop climate change.”

Individuals, including healthcare professionals, play a pivotal role in collective efforts, which are growing across the globe. By embracing sustainable practices, advocating for systemic change, and leveraging their own expertise, anyone can contribute significantly to a healthier planet and inspire positive transformations within their communities.

One small change can snowball across the entire healthcare sector, and make a real difference. For instance, the Scottish Government’s National Green Theatres Programme started as a tiny change made in one surgical theatre by one clinical team and then grew into a national initiative. Get inspired by more best practices in climate-smart healthcare.



MYTH 3: “Why should healthcare take climate action when other sectors haven’t?”

Despite being a sector whose mission is to heal, the healthcare sector has a significant climate footprint and makes a major contribution to the climate crisis. Healthcare’s climate footprint is equivalent to 4.6% of global net emissions.⁴ As the climate crisis is a global health emergency, it is crucial to take widespread action to address and mitigate the impacts of climate change on health. These actions are also necessary to protect already overburdened healthcare systems.

MYTH 4: “There aren’t enough resources in healthcare to drive climate action.”

The cost of inaction is much higher than action - not only for hospital budgets, but the human cost of diseases and deaths. Also, keep in mind that, more sustainable options in healthcare delivery can also be more cost-effective and provide equal or better patient outcomes.

MYTH 5: “One hospital cannot make a difference in the grand scheme of things.”

Innovative solutions are being created every day, and their gradual uptake across Europe will create widespread positive change. Explore HCWH Europe’s website to see more examples of healthcare climate action in practice - including the winners of our [2024 European Sustainable Healthcare Awards](#).

An example of healthcare creating change

NHS Scotland’s [Green Anaesthesia Scotland](#) project, which works to reduce the environmental impact of medical gases across healthcare services in Scotland, developed successful strategies and procedures that have now been actively adopted in other countries. Also, the European Union will now [ban the use of desflurane as of January 2026](#) - demonstrating that one hospital or region can indeed make a difference.

MYTH 6: “I am just one health professional - I can’t do this alone.”

- You don’t need to - that’s why we developed our healthcare professional networks, so you can join forces with others who share your commitment to addressing climate change. Together, we amplify our impact, share knowledge, and advocate sustainable practices. You’re also part of the majority: A study conducted in Germany in 2023 found that a majority of health professionals see the climate crisis as a major issue and recognise the connection between the climate crisis and health.⁵

MYTH 7: “My hospital management won’t care about sustainability.”

- Management may be more open than you think, particularly as many existing impactful solutions to reduce healthcare’s emissions also help cut costs, gain efficiency, and improve patient outcomes.

CONCLUSION: YOUR VOICE MATTERS



Every action you take to advance climate action is important - and that includes offering informative responses to others’ doubts or lack of knowledge about climate change and its relationship to health, and the urgent need to take climate action.

Thank you for being an advocate!



JOIN OUR NETWORKS

Health Care Without Harm's networks enable professionals to meet and collaborate with other people working in healthcare and committed to tackling climate change. Join the network that's right for you to access to more resources and connections to help you advocate healthcare climate action.

- [Doctors for Greener Healthcare](#) - bringing together doctors from across Europe to collaborate, share best practices, and advocate for a healthy future by reducing the environmental impact of healthcare.
- [Nurses Climate Challenge Europe](#) - empowering nurses from across Europe to take action against the health impacts of climate change in clinical settings
- [Pharmacists for Greener Healthcare](#) - uniting pharmacists from across Europe to share their best practices to tackle pharmaceutical pollution and its contribution to antimicrobial resistance (AMR)
- Your organisation can also join our [Global Green and Healthy Hospitals network](#) (for hospitals, health systems, and health centres only) to get free access to a range of exclusive tools and resources, including our [Healthcare decarbonisation toolkit](#), which is available in 9 languages.

SUBSCRIBE

HCWH Europe's [Climate-smart Healthcare programme](#) is dedicated to achieving a net zero carbon and climate-resilient European healthcare sector, including by mobilising healthcare professionals to use their trusted voices to drive climate action in their organisation and community. If you would like to be kept up to date with the latest developments from the programme, such as the publication of other guides like this one, you can [subscribe to our newsletter](#).



CLIMATE-SMART
HEALTHCARE



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