Health Care Without Harm

Building climate-resilient and net zero healthcare: What's next?

European Healthcare Climate Summit
2024 Event Report

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Contents

Executive summary

The sixth edition of the European Healthcare Climate Summit featured valuable insights from 15 speakers, from Belgium, Sweden, UK, Spain, and Denmark. To open the day, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe's Executive Director, Mark Wilson, delivered a keynote address on the sector's persistent challenges and approaches to overcome them. Then real-world case studies from Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust and the Region of Stockholm demonstrated actionable ways to decarbonise healthcare. Next, experts from Karolinska University Hospital and the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust shared innovative strategies to reduce emissions in the most complex areas.

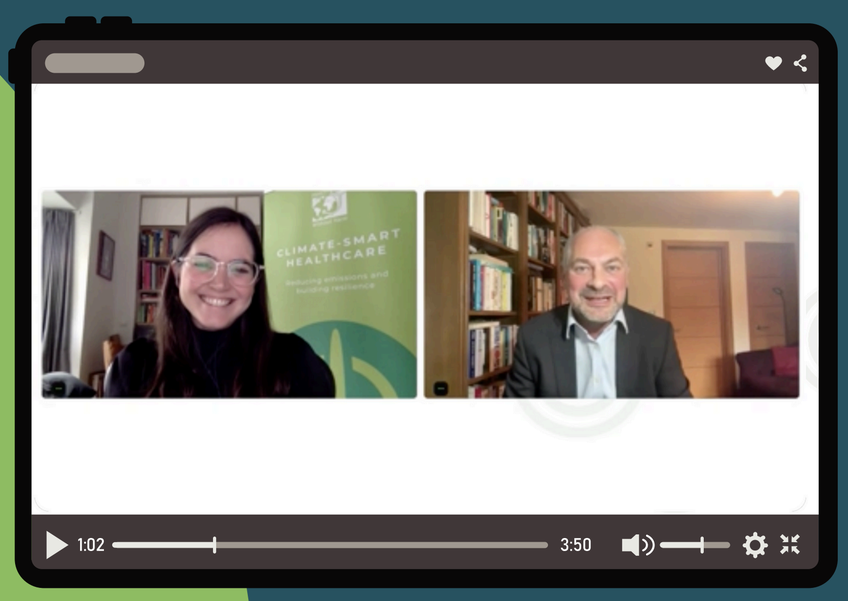
Speakers from the Galician Health Service and the Climate Psychology Alliance UK highlighted climate resilience strategies that prioritise preparedness across infrastructure, people, and processes. Discussions also explored the pivotal role of healthcare professionals in leading the transition to climate-smart healthcare, focusing on effective communication and organisational mobilisation, with contributions from Sustainability NHS Highland and HCWH Europe. To close the day, we held a panel discussion between experts in the field on the future of the movement to build climate-smart healthcare in Europe.

The Summit served as a powerful reminder that by collaborating, we can drive the transformation towards a healthier, more sustainable future for everyone.

Watch the 2024 European Healthcare Climate Summit on demand

Recordings of all sessions are now available on our website and YouTube channel

Access now



Introduction

Building on the momentum and successes of the five previous editions, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe held its annual European Healthcare Climate Summit online on 10 October 2024. The sixth edition of the conference brought together over 300 participants from across Europe, including healthcare professionals, sustainability practitioners, academics, hospital management, civil society organisations, foundations, and representatives from both the public and the private sector, under the theme, ***Building net zero and climate-resilient healthcare: What's next?***

With climate change intensifying, the healthcare sector faces growing challenges in reducing its carbon footprint and building climate resilience. Further, some healthcare facilities and systems are moving beyond the initial wave of solutions put forth over the past decade, and are keen to take new initiatives to accelerate climate action, address their climate impact and adapt to climate change. This year's Summit focused on exploring both new areas for action and replicable solutions to decarbonise healthcare and enhance its climate resilience, for both those just starting out their journey and those who are more advanced.

A word cloud illustrating the most frequently mentioned job titles and key concepts associated with the roles of participants at the 2024 European Healthcare Climate Summit:

Agenda

10 OCT 2024

10:30 - 16:00 CEST

10:30 - 10:45

10:45 - 11:30

11:30 - 12:30

14:00 - 14:45

14:45 - 15:30

15:30 - 15:45

15:45 - 16:00

Opening keynote

Decarbonising healthcare and building climate resilience: Challenges and bold solutions

Mark Wilson
Executive Director
HCWH Europe

To open the Summit, Mark Wilson, Executive Director of Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe, set the stage to welcome all attendees joining online. He emphasised that this edition of the Summit sought to focus on solutions and actions to support sustainable healthcare practices, with the central goal of building climate-resilient and zero-emission healthcare systems.

While progress towards sector decarbonisation has been made, challenges persist, particularly with Scope 3 emissions from supply chains, which are difficult to track and manage. Healthcare organisations face hurdles in balancing ambitious climate goals with regulatory demands, operational standards, and resource limitations.

Mark also highlighted a second critical challenge for the healthcare sector, in addition to reducing its own climate impact: building climate resilience. Climate resilience is defined as the ability to anticipate, respond to, and recover from the health impacts of climate change.[1] Mark stressed the urgency of embedding adaptation strategies into healthcare operations to protect patients, workers, and facilities during crises. He also underscored the vital role of healthcare professionals as advocates for climate action. Their leadership is essential in addressing public and political inertia, and it's equally important to work to protect the mental well-being of the healthcare workforce amidst the challenges presented by climate change, as part of a holistic approach to sustainable healthcare.

Looking ahead, Mark emphasised the importance of collaboration, innovation, and advocacy to achieve the scale of change needed for a sustainable healthcare future. He cited HCWH's Global Green and Healthy Hospitals network, the coalition of more than 2,000 global members, as an example of what collective action can achieve. To conclude, he reminded attendees that the health sector has both the capacity and the responsibility to take the lead in addressing climate impacts and urged an open and collaborative approach to overcoming the complex challenges ahead.

> *More people and organisations are opening their minds to the necessity of climate action for people and planet, and the myriad benefits that taking climate action offers us. There has never been a better time for action than now.*

Watch the keynote

Session 1

Decarbonising the healthcare sector: From vision to reality

The first session of the Summit explored practical examples of strategies and frameworks developed to enable a net-zero European health sector. Moderated by Mireia Figueras Alsius, Climate Programme Manager at HCWH Europe, it brought together experts in the sector to discuss the obstacles and progress in reducing healthcare's significant carbon footprint.

Mireia Figueras Alsius
Climate Programme Manager
HCWH Europe

Setting the scene: The road to net-zero healthcare

Andreas Ekvall, Senior Climate Officer at HCWH Europe, presented an overview of the healthcare sector's emissions: responsible for 4.6% of global net emissions, it is thus a considerable contributor to climate change.[2] Without decisive action, healthcare's emissions are expected to triple by 2050.[3] He introduced Operation Zero, a HCWH Europe project dedicated to empowering healthcare facilities to set and achieve ambitious decarbonisation targets. This initiative helps every European health system assess their emissions and develop a roadmap with targets and trajectories aligned with net zero emissions. Andreas underscored the urgency of mobilising the entire healthcare sector, stressing that "everyone in the health sector needs to act."

Belgium, alongside six other nations, committed to a climate-resilient, carbon-neutral healthcare sector at COP26.[4] Through Operation Zero, Belgium quantified its healthcare emissions, revealing a total output of 9,901 kilotons of CO_2, with 86% coming from indirect Scope 3 emissions, primarily linked to the supply chain and pharmaceutical production. To unify Belgium's fragmented policy landscape, the government formed a national working group that brought together healthcare and environmental experts. Bram explained that the working group has finalised a baseline study to pinpoint emission sources, which will inform a comprehensive roadmap due for completion in December. This roadmap will serve as both a guide for policymakers and a practical resource for healthcare facilities across Belgium.

Operation Zero: A Belgian perspective[4]

Bram Lefever from Belgium's Federal Ministry of Public Health, Food Chain Safety, and Environment, and coordinator of the Belgian National Environment-Health Action Plan (NEHAP), provided an example of how HCWH Europe's Operation Zero project has been implemented nationally in Belgium.

Bram Lefever

Care Without Carbon: From vision to reality in Sussex

Oliver Slaughter, Head of Environmental Services at Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust, presented the Trust's sustainability framework, Care Without Carbon (CWC), which has become an integrated tool for decarbonising healthcare in Sussex. Sussex's approach to sustainability includes health-focused measures, streamlined care pathways, and sustainable infrastructure. He emphasised that the NHS aspires to achieve net zero for direct emissions by 2040 and indirect emissions by 2045, a vision aligning with broader NHS England goals.

Oliver Slaughter

Despite notable progress in reducing emissions, staying on track remains difficult due to several challenges, including time constraints, clinical integration, limited capital, revenue funding, and sustainability not yet being integrated into clinical practice. To navigate these obstacles, Oliver described a methodology for prioritising their activity based on environmental impact as well as on patient impact, costs, and organisational priorities. The CWC framework has evolved to include a "Green Impact Tool" to enable users to understand the sustainability impact of their project and develop a high-level carbon footprint analysis. Finally, to address funding challenges, Sussex NHS developed a robust scoring methodology to highlight environmental and health benefits.

This approach secured investments for initiatives such as Net Zero Carbon Chailey, saving 52 tons of CO2e annually, and the implementation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, with the delivery plan ensuring clear communication of investment needs.

Region of Stockholm: From sustainability policy to practice

Carolina Pettersson, Sustainability Director at Stockholm, Sweden's regional healthcare authority, shared the Stockholm region's long-standing commitment to sustainable healthcare, dating back over three decades. Despite its small size, Stockholm has consistently allocated significant resources to this cause, achieving a 75% reduction in Scope 1 emissions since the 1990s and aiming for full carbon neutrality by 2035. Carolina emphasised the critical role of sustainability dialogues across all departments within the Region, noting that environmental priorities are now ingrained in decision-making processes. Carolina shared that reaching absolute net-zero remains a challenge, leading the region to pursue a realistic "near-zero" target to maintain momentum. Stockholm's approach has evolved to focus on change leadership, aiming to foster climate consciousness within its executive leadership to sustain long-term progress.

Carolina Pettersson

Watch this session

Session 2

The frontline of climate-smart solutions

This session, moderated by Andreas Ekvall, Senior Climate Officer at HCWH Europe, explored how healthcare providers are implementing cutting-edge practices to quantify and reduce emissions by developing new climate-smart solutions. Andreas emphasised the unique challenges the healthcare sector faces in reducing its carbon footprint, particularly with emissions from the supply chain, which are complex to track and reduce. He highlighted that the current “produce-use-dispose” linear economy model in healthcare requires a shift toward sustainability, urging greater collaboration with suppliers, and more granular emissions data.

He also acknowledged the complexity of integrating carbon management into healthcare planning, particularly in the supply chain. The collection of detailed data and emission calculations, and further collaboration with providers is essential to encourage them to track and reduce their emissions. Finally, he stressed that effective emission reduction in healthcare also needs more efficient medical practices that meet patients' needs.

The session’s speakers, leading efforts at healthcare institutions, shared their methods for overcoming these challenges.

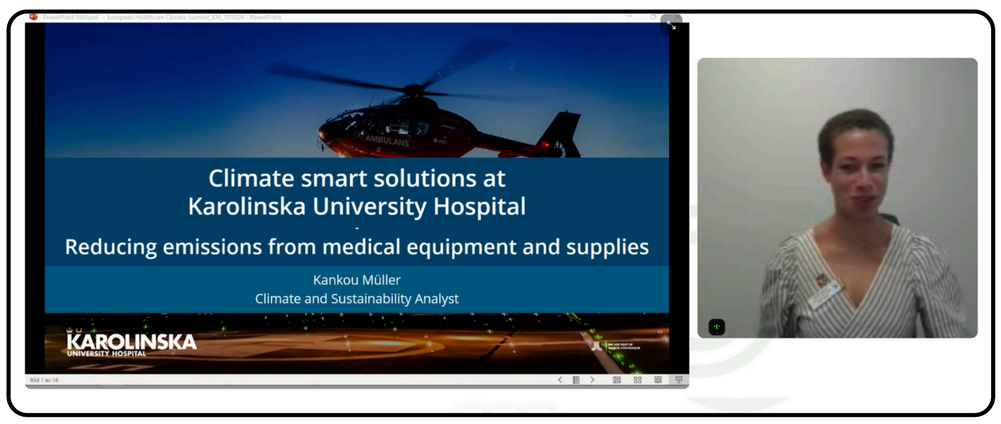
Andreas Ekvall
Senior Climate Officer
HCWH Europe

Climate-smart solutions at Karolinska University Hospital

Kankou Muller from Karolinska University Hospital in Stockholm shared insights on their sustainability initiatives. Karolinska University Hospital, one of Europe’s largest healthcare providers, has embraced several sustainability requirements. These include utilising an Environmental Management System (EMS), reducing the use of harmful pharmaceuticals, cutting carbon emissions, and increasing the use of organic food in patient meals, while also addressing food waste. Their Sustainability Program for 2023-2027 sets ambitious goals to increase the circular use of resources and lower GHG emissions by 40%, as well as reduce hazardous chemicals and pharmaceuticals by 2027.

A key part of Karolinska's strategy is to enable departments to take responsibility for their sustainability performance by monitoring and managing it. To support them, the hospital offers tools to track sustainability metrics, including data on pharmaceuticals, air travel, and single-use items. Kankou highlighted that overconsumption, especially of items like gloves, increased significantly during the pandemic, and this needs to be tackled.

Karolinska University Hospital has already achieved several successes, including a 55% reduction in food waste since 2017 and a 20% decrease in carbon emissions from anaesthetics by ceasing the use of desflurane. Notable projects include a circular apron initiative, which allows aprons to be melted down and remade, potentially reducing waste by over 200,000 kg annually, and a reusable glove program, which could cut waste by 100,000 kg per year. Additionally, the hospital is transitioning from single-use to reusable medical accessories, leading to economic savings and lower emissions. Despite all these achievements, Kankou stated that they are "proud, but never completely satisfied."



Kankou Muller

Sustainable and low-carbon procurement at Newcastle NHS Foundation: Engaging suppliers

Anna-Lisa Mills, Sustainability Manager at Newcastle NHS Foundation Trust, outlined an innovative approach to sustainable procurement and supplier engagement, addressing the significant challenge of supply chain emissions in healthcare. Newcastle NHS has made notable progress by fostering collaboration with suppliers toward a zero-emissions future.

She presented the Trust's 2020-2025 Climate Emergency Strategy, which aims to position it as a global leader in sustainable healthcare through three pillars: Zero Carbon Care, Clean Air, and Zero Waste.

The Trust targets net zero emissions for direct operations by 2030 and for supply chain emissions by 2040. Its Clean Air initiative seeks to eliminate transport-related pollution by 2030, with fully emission-free access to healthcare by 2040. The Zero Waste goal focuses on reuse and repair by 2030 and aims for zero waste through a circular economy by 2040.

Newcastle NHS's Net Zero Commitments are divided into Footprint, which tracks emissions from direct operations, and Footprint Plus, which addresses supplier emissions. Since declaring a climate emergency in 2019, the Trust has reduced its carbon footprint by 10% from 2019/20, showing steady progress. Footprint Plus requires suppliers to set Net Zero targets and publish annual Carbon Reduction Plans, moving beyond traditional spend-based screening.

While Anna-Lisa acknowledged challenges in data accuracy and collection, she emphasised the importance of action over perfection. Supplier feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, particularly from small and medium enterprises (SMEs), who value the opportunity to contribute to carbon reduction and appreciate Newcastle NHS's guidance on best practices.

Anna-Lisa Mills

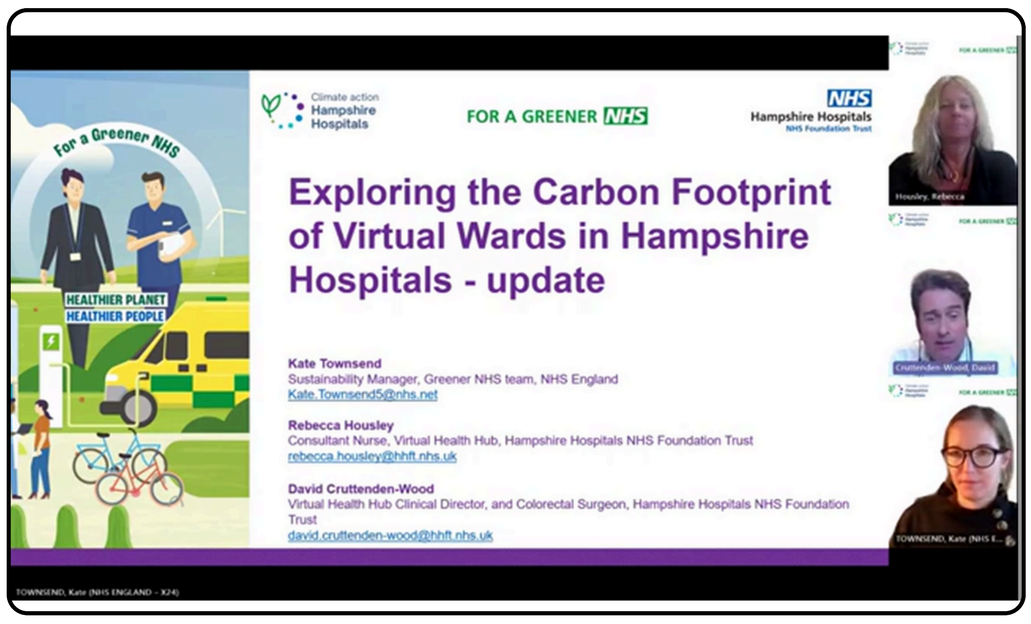
Hampshire Hospitals: Exploring the carbon footprint of virtual wards

Kate Townsend, Programme Manager at NHS England South East, Rebecca Housley, Consultant Nurse, and David Cruttenden-Wood, Virtual Health Hub Clinical Director at Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust, presented findings on the carbon footprint of virtual wards within Hampshire Hospitals, exploring both their environmental impact and patient benefits. During the presentation, they highlighted how virtual wards — a model of care that enables patients to receive acute care, monitoring, and treatment at home — can both reduce carbon emissions and support patient well-being by preventing unnecessary hospital admissions and facilitating early discharges.

The session detailed NHS England's objectives to measure and understand the carbon impact of patient care through virtual wards. Specifically, the team aimed to assess the carbon reduction potential of virtual wards compared to traditional hospital bed days, using national carbon output metrics and a toolkit, Greener Care at Home, to calculate average emissions per patient per day. This analysis involved comparing emissions data pulled manually with data extracted from large-scale Business Intelligence tools, which allowed the team to validate their methodologies and refine carbon-saving calculations.

The findings were encouraging: virtual wards saved an estimated 6,064 hospital bed days, equating to a carbon savings of approximately 283,337 kilograms of CO2e. They identified key "carbon hotspots" within the virtual ward model, including ambulance journeys, emergency department visits, and transportation for diagnostic tests. However, virtual wards also faced limitations, notably in the availability and quality of data needed to quantify the impact of these tools.

Although improvements in data collection and analysis are needed to further optimise the environmental impact of this pathway, the team concluded that virtual wards represent a viable, lower-carbon care model. Going forward, NHS England South East plans to implement recommendations locally and to share insights across virtual ward networks to refine and expand this model, with the aim of making virtual care a key component of sustainable healthcare delivery.



Rebecca Housley, Davis Cruttenden-Wood, and Kate Townsend

Watch this session

Session 3

Advancing healthcare climate resilience: A holistic approach

This session, moderated by Gabriella Abruzzo, Climate Projects Officer at HCWH Europe, addressed the concept of climate resilience in healthcare, examining best practices. Aligned with World Mental Health Day on 10 October, and its theme of Mental Health in the Workplace, the discussion emphasised the urgent need to protect the mental health of those on the frontlines, especially in response to climate-related events. Healthcare systems, already strained by the impacts of an unstable climate, are also crucial in ensuring their workforce remains supported and resilient.

Gabriella Abruzzo
Climate Projects Officer
HCWH Europe

Setting the scene: What is climate resilience in healthcare?

Gabriella began the session by introducing resilience in healthcare: defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as "the ability and agility of a system to change and flex according to circumstances and continue to function under stress while undergoing change."[5] Importantly, resilience "describes the whole system's capacity, not just the absence of vulnerability."[6] As defined by the WHO, a climate-resilient health system "anticipates, copes with, and adapts to climate shocks," to keep health improvements moving forward.[6]

She reminded attendees that currently, Europe is the fastest-warming continent and it is projected that by 2100, up to 1,040 hospitals in Europe will be at high risk of total or partial shutdown due to extreme weather.[7,8]

Alarmingly, 11% of European healthcare facilities are located in flood-prone areas, making them particularly vulnerable to damage and disruption.[9] Climate-related hazards like heatwaves, floods, and wildfires place increasing demands on healthcare infrastructure, with direct impacts on facilities, surges in illness types, and indirect effects such as utility disruptions, staff shortages, and declining workforce well-being.[1]

Building climate resilience in healthcare requires a community-driven, cross-sector approach, which involves:

- Making informed decisions
- Identifying priority areas
- Conducting feasibility and cost-benefit analyses
- Continuous monitoring and support for healthcare workers
- Clear communication of progress

Hospitals and healthcare systems must be resilient to protect communities and foster broader community resilience. The session's speakers discussed the many aspects of building resilience in the sector and the healthcare workforce.

LIFE RESYSTAL Project: Building healthcare climate resilience

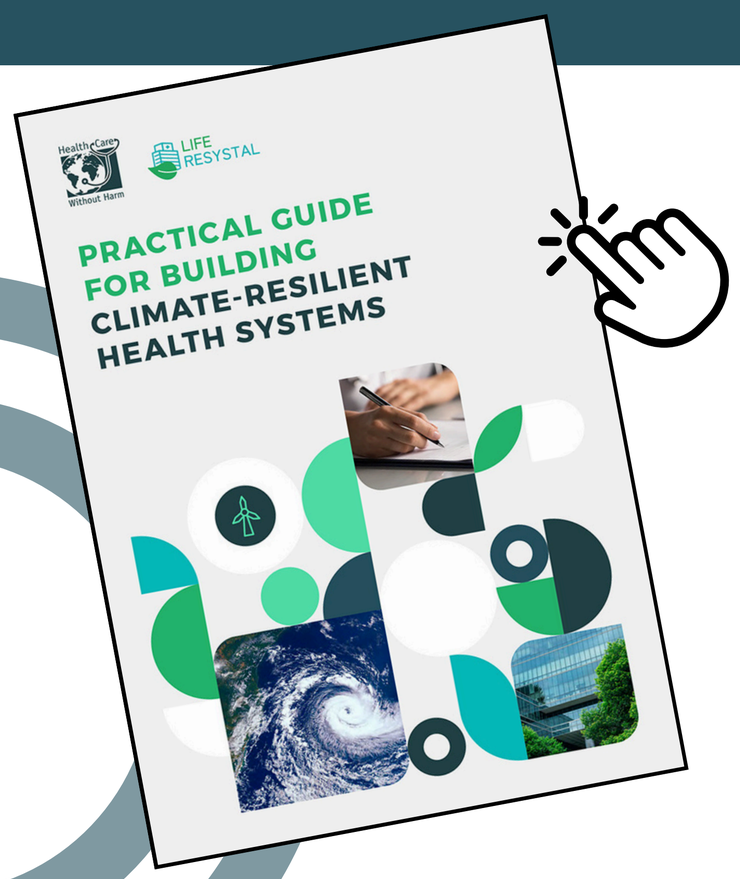
Miguel Diaz-Cacho Dafonte, biomedical engineer at the Galician Health Service, Spain, presented innovative measures they are implementing to enhance climate resilience as part of the LIFE RESYSTAL project at SERGAS hospitals. For instance, Hospital Universitario de Ourense uses green pergolas to reduce sunlight exposure, the Verín hospital collects and disinfects rainwater for a month's supply, and O Barco and Valdeorras hospitals have installed green roofs to lower internal temperatures over a 2,100 m^2 area.

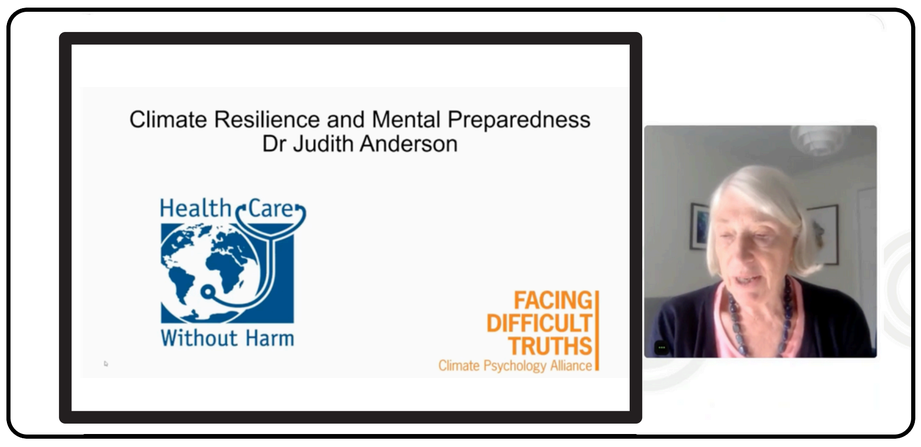
Partners in the LIFE RESYSTAL project monitor these initiatives using climate data to evaluate their effectiveness. The ultimate goal is to create a replicable model that enables other healthcare systems to adopt fast, affordable, and efficient solutions for resilience.

Related publication

In November 2024, HCWH Europe launched its flagship climate resilience publication, developed as part of the LIFE RESYSTAL project.

The Practical Guide for Building Climate-Resilient Health Systems offers a roadmap for integrating climate resilience into healthcare planning.





Dr Judith Anderson

Climate Psychology Alliance: Psychological impacts of climate change and pathways to resilience

Judith Anderson, psychotherapist at the Climate Psychology Alliance, discussed the psychological impacts of climate change, including temperature effects, acute climate events, and eco-distress. These impacts affect everyone, with specific issues like violence, suicide, and increased psychiatric admissions linked to temperature extremes. For example, during the 2022 heat dome in British Columbia, Canada, 8% of people with psychosis died. Additionally, northern Europe faces a significant mental health burden from floods and storms.

Vulnerability factors to these psychological impacts include age, pre-existing medical conditions, inadequate insurance, and social deprivation. Eco-anxiety and eco-distress are also rising, especially when individuals experience both emotional distress and the physical impact of climate events, like flooding.

To address these issues, Judith emphasised the importance of breaking the silence around climate change, fostering solidarity, and normalising climate-related emotions. She suggested creating spaces, such as Climate Cafes or Schwartz Rounds, where people can discuss their eco-emotions. She reminded us that we are all in this together, and urged true hope that confronts the challenges posed by climate change.

Watch this session

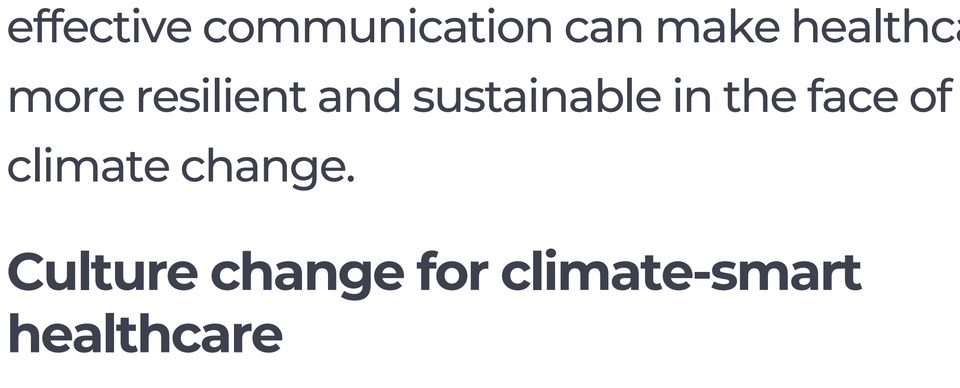
Session 4

Healthcare professionals leading the transition

Healthcare professionals are on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Lara Grosso Sategna, Network Development Officer at HCWH Europe and moderator of the session, discussed how the role of healthcare professionals today goes beyond treatment and care, extending into advocacy and leadership in raising awareness of climate-related health consequences, implementing evidence-based policies, and empowering communities. Lara stated: "Healthcare professionals are in a unique position to lead the transition toward climate-smart healthcare. Not only are they seeing firsthand the health impacts of climate change, but they also have the knowledge, skills, and trust of their communities to make a real difference." The session's speakers highlighted how culture change, active engagement, and effective communication can make healthcare more resilient and sustainable in the face of climate change.

Culture change for climate-smart healthcare

Kenneth Barker, Consultant Anaesthetist at NHS Highland and Board Member at HCWH Europe, discussed how healthcare can drive meaningful climate action focusing on fostering a culture of sustainability and resilience among healthcare staff and the broader community.



Kenneth Barker and Lara Grosso Sategna

Lara Grosso Sategna
Network Development Officer
HCWH Europe

Small steps, grounded in evidence and spread through local and national clinician networks, can reduce emissions and alleviate climate anxiety among healthcare workers. One significant initiative was reducing desflurane use in anaesthesia, which lead to 8,000 tons of CO_2e savings.

Kenneth emphasised the importance of grassroots networks, such as the Green Anaesthesia Scotland Group, which initially communicated through WhatsApp to share information, peer-educate, and engage clinicians. Through this group, their work at COP26 and government partnerships has evolved into a government-backed program for system-wide sustainable change. The National Green Theatre Programme emerged from this, with 50 actions aimed at reducing resource use, waste, and energy in surgical theatres, which are some of the most energy-intensive areas in healthcare. The vision of the programme was to embed sustainability into every clinical and managerial decision.

Kenneth also provided examples of innovative projects, including the Green Dividend initiative, which saves CO_2e and millions in energy costs by switching off heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) between 8 pm and 6 am and over the weekend. Another example was the TinyAir system, which cuts energy and water use by 80% in sterilisation processes and does not use detergents. Efforts to minimise microplastics, reduce single-use plastics, and promote reusables were also highlighted. Key successes of these initiatives include 20,421 tons of CO_2e savings and an estimated £6 million in green dividends. Kenneth stressed that clinical responsibility assumes that a patient is not just a person in front of us but their family, their community, our society, and humanity. So, good environmental stewardship is good patient care.

Kenneth and Lara discussed the enthusiastic response among anaesthetists, noting that early climate actions — such as eliminating desflurane — were easy to implement without impacting patient safety. For further impact, Kenneth suggested embedding climate topics in medical curricula so future clinicians are prepared to address environmental sustainability in healthcare.

Healthcare professionals as climate and health communicators

Hope Robinson, Climate Communications Officer at HCWH Europe, discussed the importance of effective communication from healthcare professionals to succeed in advocating for climate action.

Hope emphasised two key reasons healthcare professionals are vital in driving climate action: their trusted status and their ability to frame climate change as a health issue. Their ethical standards, scientific expertise, and community involvement make them credible voices in society. Health framing of the climate crisis is highly effective in motivating action, and healthcare professionals can leverage this by positioning climate action as health action.[10] This unique combination of trust and expertise creates a powerful opportunity to spark dialogue and drive change.

> *Effective communication is at the heart of all progress - every initiative, policy change, or community effort begins with discussion and shared understanding - which makes the role of skilled communicators absolutely vital in driving meaningful progress on climate issues.*

Hope Robinson
Climate Communications Officer
HCWH Europe

Next, Hope outlined five core principles that underlie effective climate communication:

- Address both mitigation and resilience aspects of climate action
- Focus on local, immediate impacts to make climate change relatable
- Highlight the co-benefits of climate action, like improved public health
- Communicate with empathy and accessibility to reach broader audiences
- Offer hope and share success stories to inspire action.

Finally, she shared HCWH Europe's resources to support healthcare professionals to gain and hone communications skills, including Using Your Voice to Drive Climate Action, a guide to help professionals define their communication style and create concise messaging, and Debunking Climate Myths and Empowering Climate Action, a guide which offers pre-crafted, straightforward responses to common climate misconceptions.

Finally, Hope reminded all health professionals of the critical role each of them can play, by speaking up for climate action as health action and working to shift practice, finance, and power.

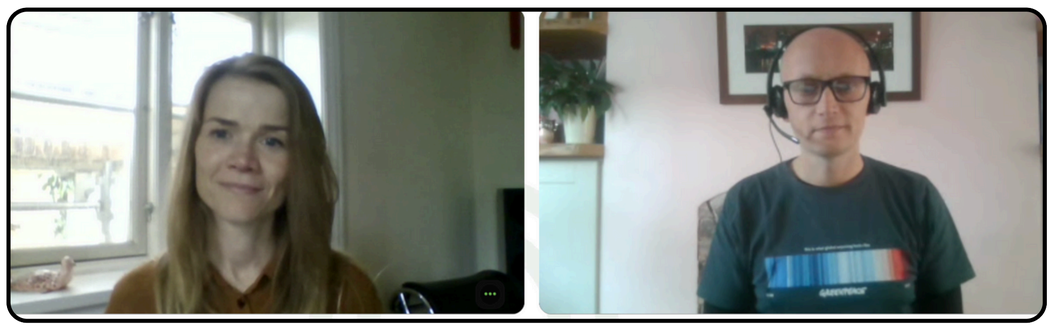
Watch this session

Closing session

Expanding the horizons of climate-smart healthcare

In the closing session of the Summit, Mireia Figueras Alsius, Climate Programme Manager at HCWH Europe, moderated a discussion between Maria Gaden, Chief of Development at the Center for Sustainable Hospitals, Central Denmark and board member at HCWH Europe, and James Dixon, Associate Director of Sustainability at Newcastle Hospitals and Vice Chair of the Board at HCWH Europe. They shared their sustainability journeys and discussed the future of the transition to net zero and climate-resilient healthcare.

James initially worked as a lone environmentalist within a large organisation, and subsequently built "Shine Sustainable Healthcare" within Newcastle Hospitals. His eco-distress intensified in 2018 when he noted the lack of transformative actions being taken. With "Shine," recognising the importance of health sector climate action, Newcastle Hospitals became the first healthcare organisation to declare a climate emergency. For James, it has been crucial to speak the truth, find a community to meet regularly, share and learn, as well as normalise the emotions of eco-distress.



Maria Gaden James Dixon

Maria's sustainability journey began when she was a midwife and felt a disconnect between her values and her organisation's lack of environmental commitment. This "cognitive dissonance" motivated her to start small projects to bridge the gap, working toward aligning her organisation's mission of doing good with a focus on sustainability. Today, her hospital network has sustainability consultants in every hospital. On making progress happen, she stated:

> *No change is too small to be part of the bigger change we need.*

Looking forward, both Maria and James shared key milestones which they hope to achieve in the next five to ten years to ensure that the healthcare sector is on track to meet net-zero and climate resilience goals. Maria hopes sustainability will be part of the legal framework and integrated into all medical curricula within five years. She also envisages a holistic economic model that values natural resources, health, and well-being alongside finances. Maria added the idea of developing "Prep Tech Europe" to make prevention financially viable by turning the system around to prioritise preventative care. James spoke of embedding sustainability in organisational culture, focusing on people and health, decarbonising healthcare, and moving to a circular economy model to minimise waste and carbon emissions.

When asked what advice they would give to those at the beginning of their sustainability journey, James encouraged perseverance, advising healthcare workers to keep going and not stop if they find doors closed. Maria emphasised the importance of teamwork, advising not to try to do this alone and to make sure to get leaders in your “tribe”.

On what gives them hope, Maria reflected that while the future might seem daunting, she is encouraged by the exponential progress and growing national and global cooperation in this field. She said that so much has happened in these years, and believing this development can keep accelerating gives her hope. James added that his hope stems from empowering clinical teams to take sustainability seriously, as seen in HCWH Europe's Born Green Generation project, which demonstrates how impactful clinicians can be.

To conclude, Mireia encouraged everyone to turn what they learned in this conference into meaningful action within their own organisations and continue this vital work together.

Watch this session

Audience and impact

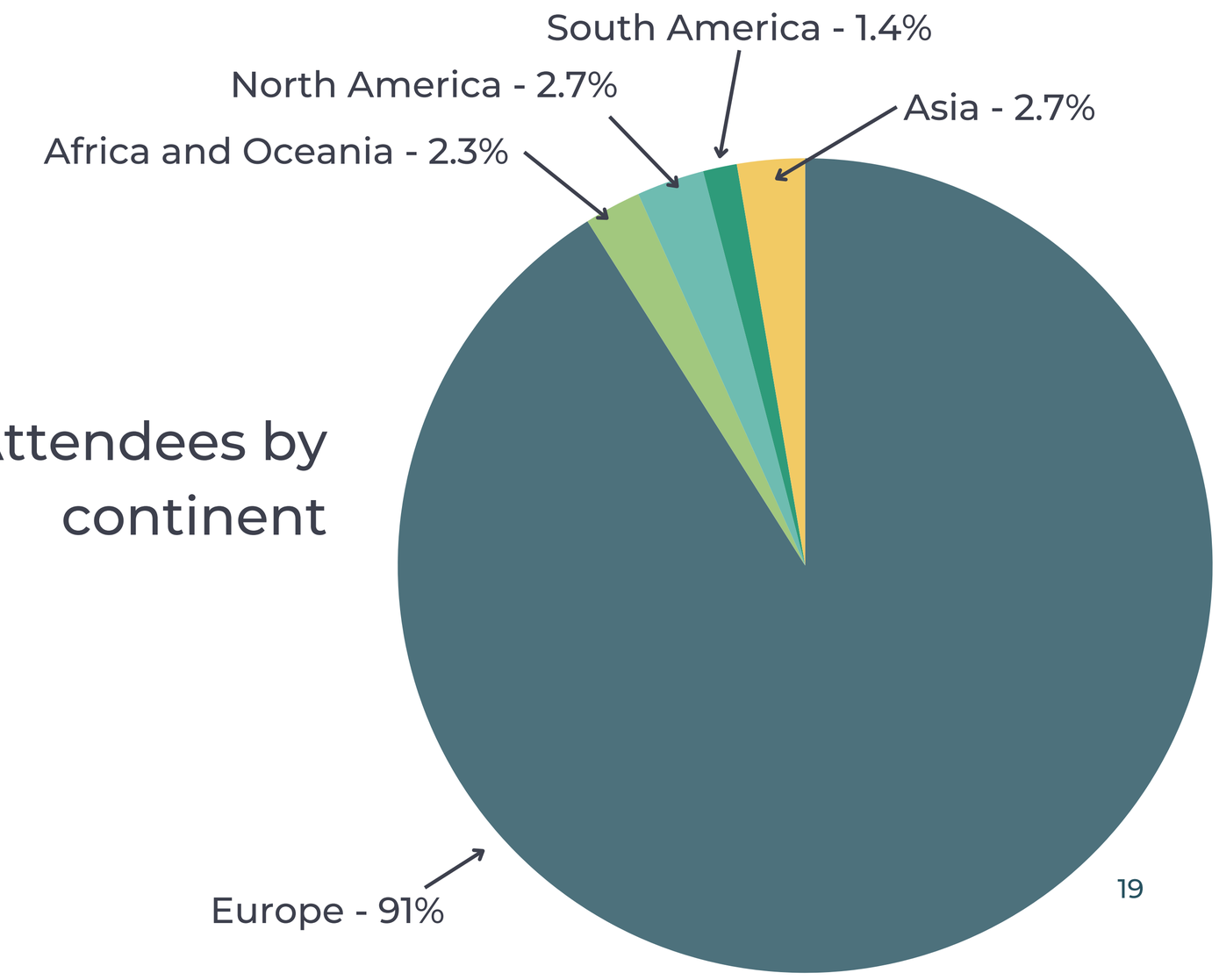
The 2024 Summit brought together an impressive range of attendees from over 50 countries, underscoring its international reach and diverse representation. Across Europe, Belgium, the UK, Italy, Spain, and Germany demonstrated their strong commitment to advancing climate-smart healthcare. Participants also joined from around the world, including Argentina, Australia, India, Nigeria, Kenya, China, and Brazil. The Summit's global participation also highlighted that climate change is a global challenge, not confined to Europe, and addressing it requires collective efforts from all countries worldwide.

This global representation was complemented by the wealth of professional expertise showcased throughout the event. The lineup of 15 speakers represented countries across Europe: Belgium, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Denmark.

Attendees included sustainability managers, medical doctors, researchers, public health specialists, and key leaders such as CEOs, heads of sustainability, and directors. This diverse mix of backgrounds fostered engaging and dynamic discussions during session chats, where participants shared experiences, compared challenges, and offered fresh perspectives on complex issues.

The networking sessions further enhanced this exchange of ideas, providing attendees with an opportunity to connect on key topics shaping the future of climate-smart healthcare. Participants joined one of three roundtable discussions focused on the Summit's main themes— healthcare decarbonisation, healthcare professionals' role in driving the transition, and building healthcare climate resilience —and forged connections that extend beyond the Summit.

Attendees by continent



Key takeaways and conclusion

Throughout the day, speakers consistently emphasised that collaboration is the cornerstone of progress. They highlighted the importance of sharing resources, learning from one another, and cultivating partnerships that transcend borders and sectors. As one speaker aptly reminded the audience, "Perfection should not be the enemy of ambition"—a call to action that underscores the value of all efforts, big or small, in driving change. Across the sessions, speakers recognised the important truth that collective efforts and shared resources amplify impact.

Participants were also encouraged to persist in their efforts, lean on each other for support, and build networks with those who share their vision for a sustainable future.

These connections, formed across disciplines and geographies, are vital to overcoming the complex challenges of achieving climate-resilient and net-zero healthcare systems.

The Summit leaves us with a powerful reminder: the journey toward climate-smart healthcare is not only a shared responsibility but also an extraordinary opportunity for transformation. By working together, we can accelerate the shift toward a healthier and more sustainable future for all.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all attendees and speakers for contributing their insights, expertise, and energy to this important dialogue.

Through your engagement, we continue to strengthen a global network of hospitals, healthcare facilities, and individuals dedicated to building a net zero carbon and climate-resilient world. Thank you!

Click to watch the recordings of the 2024 European Healthcare Climate Summit on our website

Get involved

Subscribe

If you would like to be kept up to date with the latest developments from our Climate-smart Healthcare programme, including information on the next edition of the European Healthcare Climate Summit, you can subscribe to our newsletter.

Join our network

If you are interested in reducing the carbon footprint, strengthening the climate resilience of your hospital/health centre, or minimising the impact of your day-to-day work in healthcare, there are several ways you can join our network:

.

Organisational membership of **Global Green & Healthy Hospitals** (hospitals, health systems, and health centres only) - giving your institution free access to a range of exclusive tools and resources, including our *Healthcare Decarbonisation Toolkit*.

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 across Europe to take action against the health impacts of climate change.

Pharmacists for Greener Healthcare - bringing together pharmacists from across Europe to share their best practices to tackle pharmaceutical pollution and its contribution to antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

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