



**HOW-TO...**

**Educate Members on the  
Links Between  
Climate and Health**



**UK Health Alliance  
on Climate Change**

# Introduction

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change has called for healthcare professionals of all levels to be educated and informed on the health risks associated with climate change and adaptation measures that need to be implemented across health systems.



UKHACC membership organisations play a critical role in delivering these aims by educating the health professionals they interact with on the **links between climate and health**, and supporting them to **develop knowledge and skills to take action for change** within their sphere of influence.

The provision of relevant **education and training** is therefore key to enabling health professionals to **deliver change, influence decisions, and communicate effectively** with patients and colleagues.

This guide outlines how UKHACC member organisations can develop and deliver education and training initiatives for this purpose.

## 1. Scope what is needed

Once you have identified the learning need, complete a **scoping exercise** to assess whether a resource already exists that can be used directly or adapted for your profession.

Examples of other organisations that may have already developed comparable resources include the **Centre for Sustainable Healthcare**, other professional healthcare colleges, associations and societies, academic institutions, and other international organisations.



## 2. Specify Educational Aims

Educational aims are a good first step. They are statements of intent that specify what an educational programme aims to achieve. Ideally, these aims will articulate how a proposed educational programme will: contribute to the fulfilment of the organisation's overarching vision and mission; and contribute to the fulfilment of the organisation's climate change and sustainability plan (if it has one).



Ideally, these educational aims will be defined by the organisational leadership in consultation with the wider membership. Where this is not feasible, a special interest group, or an otherwise informal group of members may recommend to the organisational leadership the educational aims, and develop a programme based on them.

As one example, the **NHS Leadership Academy** defines the aims for its 21-week **'Sustainability Leadership for Greener Health and Care Programme'** as follows:

**"This programme is designed to develop your leadership abilities, giving you the tools and knowledge to build a greener, more sustainable health system. It will help you foster confidence in yourself and your capacity to lead the health system towards net-zero."**

In another example, the School of **Nursing and Midwifery at the University of Plymouth** has outlined a **statement of aims** on how it plans to embed sustainability across the curricula of its various programmes:

**"We aim to support and position the School of Nursing and Midwifery as a leading centre of excellence, embedding sustainability in our curricula and delivering evidence-informed sustainability education."**

The **Centre for Sustainable Healthcare** offers a wide range of **courses for UK health and care professionals** on topics of sustainability, climate change, and healthcare.

**On their website**, you can read how they have defined the aims for their courses and programmes.



### 3. Specify Learning Outcomes

Once the overall aims of your education programme on climate change, sustainability, and healthcare has been established, the next step is to articulate the knowledge and skills that will be acquired to achieve these aims, i.e. learning outcomes.

**Learning outcomes are clear, measurable statements describing what learners will be able to know, understand, or do after going through an educational process.**

They focus on **demonstrable knowledge and skills**, providing a framework for course design, teaching, and assessment. These statements help course designers, administrators, educators, and learners to **understand the specific goals and expectations** of the learning process.



#### Well-written learning outcomes are:

##### ● Aims-driven:

They emerge from broader educational aims, and are intended to achieve them.

##### ● Learner-centred:

They are written from the learner's perspective, focusing on what they will be able to do.

##### ● Action-oriented:

They use active, measurable verbs to describe what the learner can demonstrate, like "explain," "analyse," or "calculate".

##### ● Measurable:

They are specific and observable, allowing for assessment to determine if the learning has been achieved.

##### ● Outcome-focused:

They describe the result of learning, not the process or activity itself.

## A Framework of Learning Outcomes in Sustainable Healthcare Education

In 2015, the Sustainable Healthcare Education Network, articulated a framework of learning outcomes on the theme of climate change, sustainability, and healthcare, based on a UK-wide consultation with healthcare educators, healthcare students, and other key stakeholders. These learning outcomes were endorsed in the Consensus Statement of the Association for Medical Education in Europe on education for planetary health and sustainable healthcare in 2021.

The framework specifies three learning outcomes that healthcare professionals should be supported to achieve through their education and training in order to be prepared to address the adverse impacts of the climate and nature crisis on human health. These outcomes are linked to three occupational roles that healthcare professionals perform.

They are:

1. **Describe** how the environment and human health interact at different levels; **linked to the role of healthcare professionals as 'scientists' or 'scholars'**.
2. **Demonstrate** the knowledge and skills needed to improve the environmental sustainability of health systems; **linked to the role of healthcare professionals as 'practitioners'**.
3. **Discuss** how the duty of a healthcare professional to **protect and promote health** is shaped by the dependence of human health on the local and global environment; **linked to the role of healthcare professionals as 'members of a profession'**.

A more detailed elaboration of the knowledge and skills relevant to these three categories of learning outcomes can be **accessed here** [ADD LINK], and in the appendix at the end of this document. Although these learning outcomes were developed in the context of undergraduate and postgraduate medical education, they offer a useful framework for UKHACC members to translate their broader educational aims into more concrete educational offerings for members.

A special interest group may be established to develop specific learning outcomes, and based on these, to develop education programmes. To develop learning outcomes, special interest groups can use the following strategies:

- **Survey members** to find out the **knowledge and skills they want to acquire to address the climate and nature crisis**

- **Review the learning outcomes of existing general and specialist educational programmes on the climate and nature crisis and healthcare, including:**

Course offerings from the [Centre for Sustainable Healthcare](#)

[Introduction to Sustainable Healthcare](#), the Faculty of Public Health

[Sustainability Leadership for Greener Health and Care programme](#), NHS Leadership Academy

[Sustainable Healthcare](#), life-long learning short course at the University of Oxford

[How to drive sustainable healthcare](#), short course from University College London

Course offerings from the [Sustainable Quality Improvement Academy](#)

Course on [health impacts of the climate emergency](#) by the Royal Society of Medicine

The UK Medical Schools Council-approved [curriculum on education for sustainable healthcare](#) for UK medical schools

[Education for sustainable healthcare](#) within UK pre-registration curricula for allied health professionals

[CPDmatch](#), repository of online CPD courses on climate change and health topics

[UN e-course](#) on human health and climate change

[Climate Ambassador Training course](#)

- **Reach out to fellow organisations and/or seek expert advice on developing learning outcomes**

## 4. Deliver Educational Programming

After specifying educational aims and learning outcomes, organisations can begin to deliver education offerings to their membership. This can involve:

1. **Recommending** or mandating members to participate in **already-available educational programmes**, such as:
  - **Introductory modules**
  - **Existing CPD offerings**
  - **Existing specialist courses**
2. **Designing and delivering bespoke educational programmes** to meet organisational needs
3. **Incorporating** knowledge and skills on the links between healthcare and the climate and nature crisis in **qualifying and certifying examinations and assessments**.



Ideally, organisations will **combine all three approaches** to create an organisational environment that encourages continuous learning, and incentivises professionals to translate knowledge into action to drive change within their specialties, and in the healthcare sector as a whole.

### Enablers

**The majority of healthcare professionals in the UK are concerned about addressing the climate and nature crisis. This means that most healthcare professionals will be motivated to learn about how they can contribute to making a positive change.**

In fact, it is very likely that all **UKHACC member organisations** will have at least a few members who have a **good understanding of how the climate and nature crisis impacts health**, and how changing healthcare practice is an important part of addressing the problem. UKHACC member organisations can **build on these resources** when planning and delivering education programmes.

Existing health professions education curricula and assessments **already emphasise** content that serves as a strong foundation for professionals to understand the links between healthcare and the climate and nature crisis. This includes themes such as **interpretation of evidence, systems thinking, diagnostic skills, treatment planning, and communication**. UKHACC member organisations can **build on this existing knowledge** and skill base to deliver education programmes.

Increasingly, **knowledge and skills for addressing the climate and nature crisis, and ensuring environmentally sustainable healthcare provision** are being included as **professional education standards** in different healthcare specialties. For example, in 2018, the **General Medical Council** included knowledge and skills about health and sustainability in its **Good Practice guidelines** for doctors. UKHACC member organisations can assess whether similar provisions have been made in the professional standards of the areas they work in, and use this as a basis for **designing and delivering education programmes**.

## Challenges

**Environmental determinants of health are often not adequately emphasised in health professions education and training, and environmental considerations are not embedded into the development and certification of professional skills. As a result, professionals tend to perceive action to address the climate and nature crisis as values-driven activism that one pursues outside the workplace, rather than an integral aspect of one's professional duties. UKHACC member organisations will need to incorporate responses to such perceptions in education programmes.**

Public health principles of illness prevention and health promotion tend to be marginalised in mainstream healthcare practice, making resource-intensive practices of treating bio-physiological illness in individuals at all costs the default norm in the sector. This can disincentivise doctors from engaging with questions of climate change mitigation that highlight health-climate co-benefits, reducing the need for clinical care, and cautious use of resources in healthcare. UKHACC member organisations will need to engage with this perspective in education programmes.

Challenging work conditions and high levels of burnout make it difficult for healthcare professionals to take time to learn new knowledge and skills, and meaningfully incorporate it into their regular work practices. UKHACC member organisations will need to respond to this reality when planning education programmes. Some strategies to do this are integrating content about the climate and nature crisis into existing modules, providing professionals time and CPD accreditation for learning new knowledge and skills, and incorporating these topics into qualifying and licensing assessments.

## Map Against Climate and Health Scorecard

**The Climate and Health Scorecard is a tool used to assess progress towards delivering the UKHACC Commitments. The following questions (and points awarded) are used to assess progress against the commitment to 'Educate members on the links between climate and health'.**

- 29.** Are the **health impacts of climate change** embedded in your (specialist exam) curriculum e.g. membership exams? **2.5 points**
- 31.** Does your organisation have a **strategy** to promote **climate, nature and health literacy** amongst all members e.g via e-learning or similar? **1 point**
- 33.** Between [monitoring dates], has your organisation run one or more **educational events** on the topics of **climate change, ecological degradation and pollution**? **1 point**
- 38.** Does your organisation promote education that highlights the role of health professionals in **decarbonising the care they deliver**? **1 point**

**Total points for this commitment: 5.5**

**Find out more about the scorecard including the complete questionnaire and previous reports at [Climate & Health Scorecard](#).**

## Learning Outcomes for Medical Professionals on Environmental Sustainability

The framework of learning outcomes presented below outlines knowledge and skills that health professions education programmes can aim to foster in participants to ensure that healthcare professions are well-equipped to address the climate and nature crisis. This list is not exhaustive, and it was originally developed in the context of medical education, i.e. the education of medical doctors. However, it offers a useful starting point for all healthcare professions to consider how to incorporate these considerations into their specialist education programmes. The content below is directly quoted from an article published in the *International Journal of Medical Education* in 2015. The article can be accessed here.

Citation: Walpole, Sarah C., et al. "Exploring emerging learning needs: a UK-wide consultation on environmental sustainability learning objectives for medical education." *International Journal of Medical Education*, vol. 6, 2015, pp. 191-200.

## Learning Outcomes for Healthcare Professionals on Environmental Sustainability

### Introduction

Although sustainability requires some new curricular material, it is primarily a perspective through which to approach existing topics, such as health inequalities and medical leadership. The learning outcomes have been designed to promote critical thinking, and development of the skills necessary to respond to change and uncertainty.

### Priority learning outcomes

- a. **Describe** how the environment and human health interact at different levels.
- b. **Demonstrate** the knowledge and skills needed to improve the environmental sustainability of health systems.
- c. **Discuss** how the duty of a doctor to protect and promote health is shaped by the dependence of human health on the local and global environment.

### Expanded learning outcomes

This section provides suggestions for more detailed knowledge and skills relevant to each of the priority learning outcomes:

#### 1. Describe how the environment and human health interact at different levels

##### Doctor as scholar and scientist

- a. **Outline the dependence of human health** on global and local ecological systems, which supply essentials such as air, water and a stable climate.
- b. **Discuss the contribution of human activity and population size** to global environmental changes such as climate change, biodiversity loss and resource depletion.
- c. **Describe the mechanisms by which human health is affected by environmental change**, for example through changes in disease vectors, exposure to extreme weather, migration and reduced food security.
- d. **Describe features of a health-promoting local environment, in community and healthcare settings**, to include access to green spaces, clean air and an active travel infrastructure.

## Learning Outcomes for Medical Professionals on Environmental Sustainability cont...

2. Demonstrate the knowledge and skills needed to improve the environmental sustainability of health systems.

### Doctor as practitioner

- a. **Define** the concept of **environmental sustainability**.
- b. **Explain** how trends in **demographics, technology, and climate and resource availability** may affect our ability to provide healthcare into the future.
- c. **Describe**, with examples, the **different types of environmental impact** resulting from healthcare provision, and how these may be measured.
- d. **Identify** ways to **improve the environmental sustainability of health systems** – in individual practice, in health service management, and in the design of care systems.
- e. **Identify** potential synergies between policies and practices that **promote environmental sustainability** and those that **promote health**.

3. Discuss how the duty of a doctor to protect and promote health is shaped by the dependence of human health on the local and global environment.

### Doctor as professional

- a. **Explain** how the **health impacts of environmental change** are distributed **unequally within and between populations** and the disparity between those most responsible and those most affected by change.
- b. **Recognise and articulate personal values** concerning **environmental sustainability**, given the relationship between the environment and the health of current and future generations.
- c. **Discuss ethical tensions** between **allocating resources to individual patients** and **protecting the environment** upon which the health of the wider community depends.
- d. **Demonstrate** awareness of **organisational sustainability policies** and the **legal frameworks for reducing carbon emissions**.