

How-To Guide 2024

## Advancing Sustainability in Public Health: Clinicians for Climate Action

ecoAmerica's How to Guide is a resource for US leaders and their stakeholders to address climate challenges wherever they are living and working.

### OVERVIEW

The Clinicians for Climate Action guide helps individuals and organizations working in public health to advance sustainability by overviewing how to educate others, identify critical engagement opportunities, produce communications, leverage data, as well as plan and pilot initiatives.

### STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1. Form a core team with a self-governed leadership structure that brings together people who share sustainability values. This structure is a pattern that can be replicated at small and large scale to advance the work. Define your purpose, ground rules and roles. Leadership is required at all levels.
  - a) have basic sustainability knowledge, have begun local work and are interested in deepening their knowledge and advancing the sustainability work at your organization,
  - b) have strong healthcare sustainability knowledge and are interested in advising and advancing the work,
  - c) are in leadership positions, are influential, have experience navigating the system to successfully advance large projects and are interested in leading the sustainability work to transform the system.
2. Educate your team on the concepts of community organizing, theory of change, deep ecology, and systems thinking. A shift in the current paradigm is needed, towards an understanding of our interconnectedness with nature, and nature as a network of inseparable relationships on which our long-term survival depends. Systems thinking involves the identification of patterns, and principles of organization that promote collaboration and an understanding of the complexity, multiple dimensions and impacts of each process.
3. Identify crises and critical points that need attention. Times of crises capture our attention, redefine priorities and make room for team building, change in strategy, transforming attitudes and norms, and innovative solutions and ideas that offer hope and new possibilities.



4. Use the power of public narrative, the psychology of hope/positive emotions, and storytelling to translate values into action, connect people, build intentional relationships, and form collaborations to work on solution-oriented projects. We have learned that health professionals care deeply about waste and pollution. When implementing projects, share with people the why and the how. Use existing internal communication channels to convene interdisciplinary sustainability working groups within each department or hospital. Have one-on-one conversations and use the power of stories to inspire people.
5. Use the power of data. The use of reliable, accurate data to develop credible solutions and evaluate outcomes by measuring the environmental and financial impacts of our work has been an effective tool to inform leaders and healthcare professionals in our system and move them to action.
6. Make a clear ask of your healthcare system and be part of the work to bring sustainability to its operations.

The asks should help place your system on a path to decarbonization: a) to develop a climate plan to achieve carbon neutral status, b) to support a transition to 100% renewables, c) to create a center for sustainability, d) to integrate environmental quality metrics into operational goals.

7. Make commitments and share them. Sharing and securing a commitment is a call for alignment and cooperation and a way to have others hold you accountable for what you have promised. Our healthcare system joined the White House Health Sector Climate Pledge.
8. Pilot projects and the difficult art of simplicity. Identify opportunities to design creative, impactful, simple pilot projects following the QI methodology. Once a project is successful it can be expanded to the next level. Learn and lead through doing the work. Use direct experience with small successes to generate more resources and encourage creativity. Projects should: decrease carbon emissions, pollution, and waste; generate cost savings or maintain costs; utilize excess capacity to not add to current staff responsibilities; and improve patient care or maintain existing standards of care.
9. Think GLOCAL (global and local considerations). Design system wide solutions keeping in mind that implementation must be local and, in some instances, hyperlocal.
10. Find resources with resourcefulness and work towards financial auto sustainability. Each objective generates resources that can be applied to the subsequent greater objective. Identify actions and interventions that save resources and reinvest cost savings in interventions that require capital investments and will further advance the transition to sustainability.

