

Standard 6: Green Initiative

<p>Rationale</p>	<p>The climate crisis is a pressing issue, significantly impacting global health and wellbeing^{1,2}. The healthcare sector contributes 4–5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, highlighting its crucial role in climate change mitigation³. Addressing these emissions can enhance patient care, staff satisfaction, and reduce costs⁴. NHS England's "Delivering a Net Zero National Health Service" report (October 2020) sets ambitious targets for achieving net zero emissions by 2040 for directly controlled emissions and by 2045 for those influenced by the NHS⁵.</p> <p>In response, the North West London Integrated Care System (NWL ICS) launched a three-year Green Plan⁶ in March 2022. This plan focuses on collaboration with communities, patients, and staff to cut carbon emissions. Primary care, accounting for 23% of NHS emissions^{5,7}, is a significant contributor, with clinical carbon (60% of primary care emissions) largely driven by pharmaceuticals^{8,9}. Non-clinical emissions come from energy use, business services, and travel⁷.</p> <p>Recognising the need for action, the Ealing Borough Sustainability Primary Care Team, in collaboration with the NWL ICS Sustainability Team, developed a 10-point green plan for GP practices in December 2022, utilising the principles of sustainable healthcare¹⁰. This plan provides guidance on integrating sustainability into practices, aiming to improve patient care, enhance staff well-being, and reduce health inequalities while cutting carbon emissions. The successful implementation of this plan through the 'Green Initiative' as part of the Primary Care Specification in Ealing GP practices.</p> <p>This standard aims to embrace the climate movement and encourage as many practices as possible to start making changes that will improve the health and wellbeing for generations to come.</p>
<p>Delivery</p>	<p>The service focuses on raising awareness, promoting collaboration within the primary care team, and engaging patients in sustainability efforts. It is structured into 'Mandatory activity' and 'Selectable Activities', with specific criteria for completion.</p> <p>Mandatory activity: Each practice needs to undertake the Mandatory activity below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate a Green Champion Lead: Appoint a Green Champion Lead (clinical and/or non-clinical) in each practice, along with a PCN Green Champion to oversee and guide practices in meeting sustainability targets. <p>Selectable activities: Practices must select a minimum of 6 out of the 31 activities listed below. Activities should be different to those undertaken in previous years unless clear evidence can be provided of significant new developments achieved in a previously chosen activity. Selected activities should ideally be spread across a minimum of 3 different categories (see categories A to I below), unless an explanation is given why this is not possible based on previously completed activities.</p> <p>Note: Practices must conduct an initial audit at the beginning of the year to establish a baseline for measuring changes in practice.</p> <p>A) Climate Change Emergency Declaration: Practices are encouraged to recognise the urgency of climate action and commit to reducing emissions. By making a formal declaration and commitment to climate action,</p>

GP practices can demonstrate to their staff and patients their dedication to both health and the future.

1. **Create a declaration statement:** Develop a declaration statement and share it on the practice website, in newsletters and on social media.

B) Staff Training and Engagement:

The primary care team is essential in combating climate change. Adopting sustainable practices not only boosts staff well-being and job satisfaction but also sets a positive example for patients.

2. **Sustainability education and resources:** Provide training and resources for staff on sustainable healthcare practices, incorporating case studies and evidence-based examples.
3. **Embed sustainability in practice culture:** Integrate sustainability into policies, new projects, and decision-making processes.
4. **Education and involvement:** Encourage trainers and supervisors to educate and involve trainees and students in 'greener sustainable primary care' initiatives and quality improvement projects focused on environmental sustainability.
5. **Green Impact for Health Toolkit:** Utilise the toolkit to track progress, collect points, and receive awards for sustainability achievements, thereby boosting staff morale and motivation.

C) Patient Empowerment and Engagement:

A 2021 MORI survey¹¹ showed that while the public views climate change as a significant health threat, they often overlook the NHS's contribution to emissions. Since tackling the climate crisis is a shared responsibility, educating and empowering patients to take action can enhance individual health and drive positive societal change.

6. **'Use your voice':** Promote your practice as 'Going Greener' practice by displaying information on reducing the carbon footprint (e.g., active travel, inhaler disposal) in the waiting room and through other communication methods (e.g., surgery website, newsletter, social media). Communicate with patients (e.g., NHS App messaging/SMS/Email) and engage with local pharmacists, schools and the local council.
7. **Promote Green Community and Lifestyle Choices:** Educate patients about the health impacts of climate change and advocate for green community initiatives (e.g., community gardens, tree planting, wildflower care). Collaborate with multidisciplinary teams and stakeholders (e.g., ARRS colleagues, social care, community organisations) to promote sustainable self-care and lifestyle choices.
8. **Involve PPG members:** Engage Patient Participation Group members in practice actions to support and educate patients.

D) Optimising Inhaler Prescribing:

Approximately 70% of inhalers prescribed in the UK are pMDIs, contributing 4% to the NHS carbon footprint. In contrast, Sweden uses only 13% pMDIs and has lower asthma death rates¹². Improving adherence to inhaled corticosteroids and inhaler technique is crucial. High-quality respiratory care that reduces admissions and exacerbations supports community health. Prioritise optimising inhaler use, educating patients, and selecting low-carbon inhalers. There is considerable variation in inhaler prescribing across boroughs in NWL. To address this, the following targets are suggested by the NWL Performance Quality Dashboard:

9. **Low-Carbon SABA MDIs:** Ensure that at least 65% of Short-Acting Beta Agonist (SABA) MDI prescribed are low carbon.

10. **DPI SABA Inhalers:** Aim for at least 10% of SABA inhalers prescribed to be DPI.
11. **Preventer DPIs and SMIs:** Ensure that at least 50% of preventer inhalers prescribed are DPIs or Soft Mist Inhalers (SMIs).
12. **Overall DPI and SMI usage:** Achieve a target where at least 35% of SABA and preventer inhalers prescribed are DPIs or SMIs.

E) Be Mindful of Medicine Usage:

Emphasise preventive care, reduce inappropriate prescribing, and promote deprescribing where appropriate.

13. **Preventive care first:** Prioritise preventive care over reactive treatments by focusing on lifestyle changes to prevent conditions like diabetes. Offer non-pharmacological alternatives before medications, and promote nature-based and green prescribing, social prescribing, exercise, smoking cessation, physiotherapy, and psychological therapies.
14. **Deprescribe where possible** (e.g., if no longer effective, if the benefit is uncertain, or if medicines are no longer being taken): Use OpenPrescribing data and tools like MedStopper to support decisions on reducing or stopping medications.
15. **Encourage patient-led ordering of prescriptions:** Promote the use of the NHS App for patient-led prescription ordering to reduce medicine wastage and avoid unnecessary third-party ordering. The NHS App also now increasingly provides patients with 'prescription tracking' which will even let them know when medicines are ready to collect from their pharmacy, reducing queries and wasted trips.
16. **Encourage Responsible Medication Use and Disposal:** Promote patient awareness about preventing medication wastage by encouraging them to check dispensed prescriptions before leaving the pharmacy (e.g., SMS). Returned medicines can be reused if not taken home. Additionally, guide patients on proper disposal methods for medications, including recycling options for blister packs and inhalers, and advocate for the reuse of equipment like walking aids.

F) Promote Active Travel:

Encourage staff and patients to use active travel methods to reduce transportation emissions. Follow the principle of "*Avoid, Shift, Improve*": avoid unnecessary trips, shift to less polluting transport, and improve efficiency by using options like electric cars and e-bikes.

17. **Promote Physical Activity and Join the RCGP Active Practice Charter:** Sign up for the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) Active Practice Charter to demonstrate your commitment to promoting physical activity. Support local initiatives like 'Ramblers Walking for Health', parkruns, green social prescribing, and green health routes. Provide patients with resources such as maps and information on walking and cycling routes to encourage active and sustainable lifestyles.
18. **Promote the Cycle to Work Scheme:** Encourage staff to participate in the government-supported 'cycle to work scheme'.
19. **Conduct a Staff Travel Survey:** Gather information on staff travel habits to identify areas for improvement and implement necessary changes.
20. **Reduce Unnecessary Visits to Practice:** Utilise digital tools and remote consultations to reduce unnecessary visits, improving accessibility and reducing travel-related emissions.

21. **Promote remote consultations and use of digital tools/online record access/online registration:** Advocate for remote consultations (video, telephone, and email) when appropriate for certain patient consultations. This offers flexibility and convenience, saves travel time, and reduces air pollution. Encouraging online record access can reduce requests from patients for printed copies of records.
22. **Train staff on efficient appointment management:** Implement active signposting by receptionists to internal and external services. Encourage patients to reduce the frequency of in-person appointments by consolidating multiple checks into single visits, when possible, such as combining diabetes and asthma reviews with an annual health check for a patient with learning disability.
23. **Support hybrid working/working from home:** Depending on practice needs, support hybrid working or working from home for practice staff to offer flexibility, increase staff retention, and provide a solution during emergencies such as staff sickness.

G) Reducing the Non-Clinical Carbon Footprint of the Practice

24. **Calculate your practice's non-clinical carbon footprint:** Use a free online [carbon footprint calculator](#) to establish a baseline. Use this data to identify and address at least one key area for emission reduction.
25. **Optimise Energy Use:** Save energy through simple behavioural changes (e.g., turning off lights and equipment when not in use, using natural light, and adjusting radiator thermostats). Perform annual maintenance on boilers and electrical systems; Conduct an energy audit to assess and reduce overall energy consumption.
26. **Invest in Energy Efficiency:** Implement upgrades such as LED lighting, motion sensors, smart meters, insulation improvements, and renewable energy options like solar panels. Review the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating and seek funding for energy-related improvements where possible.
27. **Sustainable Procurement Practices:** Choose suppliers that prioritise sustainability and carbon reduction. Opt for eco-friendly cleaning products, stationery, and Fairtrade refreshments (e.g., tea, coffee, and sugar). Cancel unnecessary services and audit purchased equipment regularly. Consider ethical banking options with institutions that have environmentally friendly practices, such as Triodos, The Co-operative Bank, or Nationwide Building Society.

H) Waste Management: Embed the principles of refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, and recycle into practice culture to minimise waste and its environmental impact.

28. **Reduce waste through behavioural changes:** Post signs like "Think before you print" and promote double-sided printing; Save pathology/microbiology forms electronically and print only when necessary; choose office snacks with compostable or recyclable packaging, or naturally wrapped treats like satsumas; avoid single-use plastics and excessive packaging; switch to online resources to reduce or eliminate paper orders (e.g., BNF); optimise stock management to prevent over-ordering and use resources before expiration.
29. **Reuse items whenever possible:** Encourage staff to reuse items instead of buying new ones; promote using reusable water bottles, plates and coffee cups; use scrap paper and paper clips instead of Post-it notes; consider adopting Sharpsmart reusable sharps bins.
30. **Recycle everything that can be recycled:** Recycle paper, plastic, metal and glass; increase paper recycling by ensuring each room has a box for paper disposal

	<p>(ensure appropriate disposal of confidential paper). Recycle electronics; find ways to recycle 'hard-to-recycle' items, such as lotion tubes/pumps, medicine blister packets, and printer toners.</p> <p>I) RCGP Green Impact for Health Toolkit</p> <p>31. If you are feeling adventurous, your practice may want to sign up to complete the RCGP Green Impact for Health Toolkit for green accreditation (13)</p>
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	<p>The provider is required to meet the below Key Performance Indicators (this will be evidenced via completion of a practice-based survey):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Designate a Green Champion Lead: Appoint a Green Champion Lead (clinical and/or non-clinical) in each practice, along with a PCN Green Champion to oversee and guide practices in meeting sustainability targets. 2. Practices must complete a minimum of 6 out of the 31 selectable activities listed above. Activities should be different to those undertaken in previous years unless clear evidence can be provided of significant new developments achieved in a previously chosen activity. Selected activities should ideally be spread across a minimum of 3 different categories (see categories A to I), unless an explanation is given why this is not possible based on previously completed activities.
Borough Team Support	<p>The local borough team will provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual self-declaration form and survey Conduct random audit at practice level <p>Practices are encouraged to join networks like Greener Practice for peer support and resource sharing</p>
References	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Nunes AR, Dale J. Primary care's preparedness for extreme weather events. Br J Gen Pract. 2024;74(743):248-249. doi: 10.3399/bjgp24X738249. 2) World Health Organization. WHO issues urgent call for global climate action to create resilient and sustainable health systems. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023. Available from: https://www.who.int/news/item/24-05-2023-wha76-strategic-roundtable-on-health-and-climate 3) Watts N, Amann M, Arnell N, et al. The 2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate. Lancet. 2019;394:1836-78. 4) Karliner J, Slotterback S, Boyd R, Ashby B, Steele K. Health care's climate footprint: how the health sector contributes to the global climate crisis and opportunities for action. Reston, VA: Health Care Without Harm; 2019. 5) NHS England. Delivering a 'net zero' National Health Service. Available from: https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs/publication/delivering-a-net-zero-national-health-service/. 6) North West London Integrated Care Board. Green Plan. Available from: https://www.nwlondonicb.nhs.uk/about-us/Sustainability/green-plan#:~:text=This%20three%2Dyear%20plan%20aims,greenhouse%20gas%20(GHG)%20emissions. 7) Tennison I, Roschnik S, Ashby B, et al. Health care's response to climate change: a carbon footprint assessment of the NHS in England. Lancet Planet Health 2021; 5(2): e84–e92. 8) British Medical Association. Sustainable and environmentally friendly general practice. June 2020. Available from: https://www.bma.org.uk/media/2570/bma-sustainable-and-environmentally-friendly-general-practice-report-june-2020.pdf. 9) Greener Practice. Available from: https://www.greenerpractice.co.uk/. 10) Mortimer F. The Sustainable Physician. Clin Med. 2010 Apr 1;10(2):110-111. 11) The Health Foundation. Going green: what do the public think about the NHS and climate