

Royal College of Physicians' report card on the UKHACC commitments

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) helped to found the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (UKHACC) in 2016. In 2023, the RCP adopted sustainability and climate change as one of its four policy and campaigns priorities, and in 2024, the college signed up to the [UKHACC commitments](#).

The UKHACC commitments are a set of guiding principles developed by UKHACC to help health organisations take steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The RCP is committed to minimising the environmental impacts of its operations. The report card published today provides a summary of the RCP's work against each of the UKHACC commitments, and where it will go further over the coming years to ensure that the organisation is continually reducing its impact on the planet while doing good for healthcare.

In 2025, there will be two report cards published, to track progress in the first year of being signed up to the UKHACC commitments. After this, the RCP will report annually on its sustainability commitments as an organisation.

UKHACC commitment	The RCP progress to date	The RCP's next steps
1. Declare that the climate emergency is a health emergency	<p>The RCP has said consistently that the climate emergency is a health emergency, including in its 2023 RCP view on healthcare sustainability and climate change.</p> <p>The RCP manifesto for the 2024 general election said that 'the climate crisis is the biggest global threat to health'.</p>	The RCP will continue to campaign for the climate emergency to be recognised as a health emergency, and for action to be taken to tackle climate change because of its health impacts.
2. Publish a plan for your organisation to get to net zero	The RCP has made progress in reducing its carbon footprint, but has not yet developed a plan to reach net zero. The RCP has two office sites in the UK – at Regent's Park, London, and The Spine, Liverpool.	The RCP recognises that it cannot achieve net zero in its current London headquarters in Regent's Park. Net zero is a key priority for future estates planning in London.

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2. Publish a plan for your organisation to get to net zero	<p>The RCP's headquarters at Regent's Park in London is a Grade I listed building, built in the 1960s. This means that the building poses sustainability challenges and requires retrofitting. The RCP does not expect that it will be possible to reach net zero in the Regent's Park building. There are continued works across the London estate to enhance its internal infrastructure, aiming to increase efficiencies and reduce energy consumption.</p> <p>Some examples of our recent initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > upgrades to its outdated electrical service provision, involving a comprehensive refurbishment of the main electrical intake room, including the installation of smart meters on our distribution boards, which aid in identifying fluctuations and areas of high energy usage > the main building is now 99% LED compliant, having replaced most of its fluorescent fittings. The college will continue to phase out the obsolete fittings as projects and funding allow. <p>In London, the RCP now uses 100% renewable electricity (REGO certified) across the site, despite the volatile utilities market. Green gas options were considered, but are currently not viable due to ongoing development of the product. As a new build, RCP at The Spine gave the RCP the opportunity to incorporate sustainability into the building as it was designed. In 2024, the internal floors of The Spine became WELL Certified™ at the Platinum level through the International WELL Building Institute – the only venue in Liverpool to hold this certification.</p>	<p>Works will continue at the RCP's site at Regent's Park in London to improve its efficiency, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > replacement of the power factor correction unit, which enhances the efficiency of electrical systems by reducing reactive power and drawing less current from the mains, contributing to cost and carbon footprint reductions > a planned upgrade to the in-house heating, cooling and ventilation (HVAC) systems, to replace the equipment to the office spaces, including a full redesign of the existing system and a reduction of internal cassettes with a more energy-efficient and cost-effective solution.
3. Campaign on mitigating and	The RCP has campaigned on mitigating and adapting to the planetary crisis for a number of years, both through its own campaigning work and through its membership of UKHACC.	The RCP will continue to campaign on mitigating and adapting to the planetary crisis, both

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<p>adapting to the planetary crisis</p>	<p>The RCP is a founding member of UKHACC, which was set up in 2016. In 2020 the RCP submitted evidence to the NHS England Net Zero call for evidence, which sought ideas on how the NHS in England could reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.</p> <p>In 2023, the RCP adopted healthcare sustainability and climate change as one of its four policy and campaigns priorities. The RCP also published a new RCP view on healthcare sustainability and climate change in 2023, setting out recommendations for government to tackle climate change, and for how sustainability could be more effectively prioritised within the NHS.</p> <p>In 2024, the RCP published the Green physician toolkit – the first of its kind for the physician community – including actions to adapt to the consequences of the climate crisis from a clinical perspective. The RCP actively contributes to UKHACC, including signing letters to ministers, joining in campaign actions and participating in working groups to draft UKHACC reports on energy (2024) and on adaptation within the NHS (2025). The RCP also campaigns on air quality, and published <i>Every breath we take</i> in 2016 with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.</p>	<p>through its own policy and campaigns work and as part of UKHACC.</p> <p>The RCP will also publish a new RCP report on air quality in 2025, with recommendations for government.</p>
<p>4. Embed sustainability in governance, structure and culture</p>	<p>At an organisational level, the RCP's Project Management Office (PMO) has responsibility for tracking the RCP's progress against each of the 11 UKHACC commitments. The PMO took on this responsibility following the RCP adopting the UKHACC commitments in 2024. The RCP, in consultation with its membership, adopted healthcare sustainability and climate change as one of its four campaigning priorities in 2023. To support its policy and campaigning work on this topic, the RCP appointed its first ever special adviser and deputy adviser on healthcare sustainability and climate change, and set up a new RCP advisory group on sustainability and climate</p>	<p>The RCP will explore how it can further embed sustainability into the wider governance and culture of the organisation. This will include the PMO coordinating quarterly reporting to the RCP Strategy Executive Group and annual reporting in the RCP's annual report required by the Charity Commission.</p>

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4. Embed sustainability in governance, structure and culture	change. This group and the special adviser role were established to advise on the RCP's influencing and policy direction on sustainability and climate change.	The RCP's advisory group on sustainability and climate change will continue to advise the RCP on its policy, influencing and campaigning activities on sustainability.
5. Develop a plan for sustainability in your specialist area	<p>The RCP represents physicians from over 30 medical specialties. The RCP's 2017 report <i>Breaking the fever: Sustainability and climate change in the NHS</i> gave an overview of the impact of climate change on healthcare in the UK. It also explored how physicians and the NHS can contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>The RCP <i>Less waste, more health</i> report explained how health professionals can positively influence societal health and wellbeing by making simple changes to the procurement and disposal of medical supplies.</p> <p>The RCP published the <u>Green physician toolkit</u> in 2024, with high-level actions that are relevant to all physician specialties to help improve the sustainability of clinical practice.</p> <p>The RCP held a specialties roundtable in 2024 to discuss common and unique barriers to sustainable practice across the physicianly specialties.</p>	<p>The RCP will continue to regularly promote the Green physician toolkit and update it as needed, so that the actions remain useful and relevant. The RCP is working with medical specialties to explore the development of specialty-specific sustainability actions, which are best led by the respective specialty.</p> <p>The RCP <u>supported a successful bid for UKRI funding, led by GIRFT and the University of Exeter</u>, to establish a 5-year research hub to produce decarbonisation guidance across medical and surgical care pathways.</p> <p>The role of the RCP will be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > provide experienced physician input to support GIRFT working groups to produce decarbonisation guidance for medical care pathways > provide expertise from the RCP's sustainability advisory group, whose experience and expertise will enhance the co-development of sustainability guidance

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5. Develop a plan for sustainability in your specialist area		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > review, co-badge and promote relevant publications and resources > communicate with and educate members and the wider healthcare system about key outputs, as well as engage with policymakers.
6. Educate members on the links between climate and health	<p>The RCP has a long history of promoting public health through evidence-based policy. Physicians and medical professionals have a key role to play not only in managing ill health, but also in supporting people to live healthier lives.</p> <p>With special adviser on sustainability Dr Mark Harber, the RCP has produced podcasts and videos about the health impacts of climate change, to educate members and clinicians. These are grouped with a 'sustainability' tag on the RCP website for ease of access.</p> <p>Educating clinicians about the link between climate and health was also a key objective for the Green physician toolkit. The toolkit included infographics about the link between climate and health to share online and use in physical NHS clinical settings. UKHACC used the toolkit as a case study of how to educate members about the links between climate and health.</p> <p>The RCP has also placed several opinion pieces in national media and run several sessions at its flagship Medicine conferences about the links between health and climate. The RCP's Medicine 2023 conference was themed around healthcare sustainability.</p>	<p>The RCP has appointed Dr Bryony Alderman as its sustainability fellow, based in the RCP Education Directorate, to consider how the RCP can best provide educational resources to members on this topic. This will include new podcasts on healthcare sustainability, with episodes planned on sustainable diabetes care and sustainable hospital toolkits.</p> <p>The RCP also plans to incorporate sustainable healthcare and SusQI into its Chief Registrar Programme for the 2025/2026 chief registrar cohort. Work is underway to create freely available teaching materials about sustainable healthcare for use in NHS trusts, including a slide set and lesson plan with interactive activities. These will draw on NHS guidance and the Green physician toolkit.</p> <p>The RCP will also explore a series of 'how to' guides on topics such as creating more</p>

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6. Educate members on the links between climate and health		<p>sustainable clinical skills and simulation, or writing a business case to promote sustainable change in the workplace.</p> <p>The RCP will use its Medicine 2025 conference to advertise the Green physician toolkit, raise awareness, gather member views and undertake market research into the ways in which membership would like to learn more and engage with healthcare sustainability. The RCP will host a webinar about how to talk to patients about air quality and clean air.</p>
7. Disinvest in fossil fuels and sign the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty	<p>The RCP <u>ended all its investments in fossil fuels</u> 2 years ahead of the deadline set in the new climate policy that it adopted in January 2020.</p> <p>The RCP signed the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty in 2022. The RCP is <u>listed under the 'United Kingdom'</u> list of signatories.</p>	The RCP has reviewed its investment strategy in 2024 and recommitted its stance on no investments in fossil fuels.
8. Acknowledge the link between climate change and inequalities	<p>The <u>RCP view on healthcare sustainability and climate change</u> in 2023 acknowledged links between climate change and health inequalities throughout, saying:</p> <p><i>'The transition from fossil fuels is necessary but it must be managed in a way that does not exacerbate health inequality ... While the government must rapidly eliminate all forms of government subsidies, investments, new licences and consent for fossil fuel exploration, extraction and sales, it must also set out a range of complementary policy interventions at both national and local level, for example around skills and training, to achieve a just transition.'</i></p>	<p>The RCP will continue to acknowledge and highlight the link between climate change and health inequalities.</p> <p>The RCP will continue to make the case for a just transition from fossil fuels, and that the transition to net zero must be done in a way that does not exacerbate existing inequalities.</p>

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8. Acknowledge the link between climate change and inequalities	We have been explicit in our campaigning about the need to consider health inequalities in terms of the impacts of climate change but also the impacts of adaptation, such as ensuring that a move away from fossil fuels is a just transition, that people are able to insulate their homes with government help.	
9. Develop and implement a travel policy for members and staff	<p>The RCP's new travel policy, implemented in 2025, states that 'claimants should consider the impact travel has on the planet when deciding to travel and selecting the most appropriate mode of travel'.</p> <p>It says that domestic air travel is discouraged due to its impact on the environment and only allowed in exceptional circumstances with the approval of an executive director. It must always be economy class.</p>	The RCP will review the impact of this new travel policy on the use of domestic flights a year from its introduction and publish an update.
10. Prioritise plant-based and sustainably sourced food	<p>The RCP's catering is provided by Company of Cooks. This is for all internal and external catering, including member conferences, staff events and when our spaces are hired as commercial event spaces.</p> <p>The Company of Cooks menus offer a selection of plant-based dishes. Plant-based options are purposefully featured at the top of each menu package on offer to highlight these sustainable, nutritious choices. Different menus are offered each season.</p> <p>In 2023, Company of Cooks also implemented an ethical eating 'higher welfare purchasing' strategy, which translated to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > only using seasonable and local produce on its menus > only using British cheeses and meats > only using fish rated MCS 1, 2 and 3 	<p>The RCP will continue to work with suppliers to ensure the ongoing delivery of a wide range of sustainable and nutritious food options.</p> <p>The RCP London site is set up for the new recycling legislation coming into effect from April 2025.</p>

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10. Prioritise plant-based and sustainably sourced food	<p>> removing air-freighted items from supply.</p> <p>The catering company also holds the maximum 3-star rating from the Sustainable Restaurant Association's Food Made Good Framework. Company of Cooks applies a 'local larder' strategy to its produce sourcing. The London Larder is a collection of local, boutique suppliers who prioritise local ingredients, sustainability and quality. Company of Cooks are working on building a Northern Larder for the RCP in Liverpool.</p> <p>Additionally, the London menu now includes dishes created with fruit and vegetables from Waste Knot, a company working with farmers to save surplus and imperfect produce from landfill. The RCP has taps to bottle mineral still and carbonated water in house rather than purchasing bottled water, which reduces plastic waste. Single-packaged sauces have also been removed, with condiments and sauces provided in glass bottles or bowls.</p> <p>In Liverpool, all hot fork buffet menus for daytime conferences and events include at least one fully vegan main dish option and at least one fully allergen-free dish option. Pork has been reduced from hot fork buffet menus. All packaging (coffee cups, lids, takeaway boxes) is compostable. Used coffee grounds are donated to café customers and tenants to be used as compost for plants. In 2024, the café also joined the app Too Good To Go to save leftover food from going to waste.</p> <p>In London, the RCP has a compost area to recycle the majority of its garden waste and return it to the garden to improve the soil. There are five worm bins to process kitchen waste and produce natural liquid plant feed.</p>	

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10. Prioritise plant-based and sustainably sourced food	<p>The London recycling rate has increased by 2% from 2023 to 2024 and now has a gold rating from the waste supplier. Key highlights from London's recycling rate include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 80% recycling rate > 0% to landfill > 30.7 tonnes of CO2 saved > 25,222 kg of waste to energy > 50,125 kg of recycled waste > 224 trees saved. <p>Liverpool City Council is responsible for recycling at The Spine.</p>	
11. Move to greener banking choices	<p>The UKHACC commitment on green banking defines a green bank as one that does not invest in fossil fuels. The RCP's assessment is that UK mainstream banks do not currently fare well in terms of green banking. Most organisations, including the RCP, have chosen their banking arrangements based on commercial terms and risk ratings.</p>	<p>The RCP has committed to undertake a piece of research into the green banks available that would meet its banking requirements and risk profile. This will be completed in 2025 and, based on its findings, will shape our next steps to moving to greener banking.</p>

The decision to sign up to the UKHACC commitments was taken by the RCP's Strategy Executive Group in November 2024. Work on the commitments is now being led by the RCP's Project Management Office. For any further information, please email kieron.scott@rcp.ac.uk.