



briefing

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Climate change and the NHS: new legislation and initiatives

Key points

- New legislation establishes a long-term legal framework for tackling climate change, including greenhouse gas emissions targets and a new structure for reporting to Parliament on progress.
- *Saving carbon, improving health* sets a pledge for the NHS to become one of the leading sustainable and low carbon organisations and shows why the NHS should aim to reduce carbon emissions by at least 10% by 2015.
- The Government is preparing to introduce a carbon reduction commitment scheme in 2010.
- Despite the current recession, work to tackle climate change must remain a priority for NHS boards.
- The NHS is increasingly influencing climate change legislation in Europe

Climate change is now recognised as one of the most significant challenges facing today's world. Man-made emissions have led to a massive increase in the volume of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and global warming is happening significantly faster than before, both of which have huge implications for human health and the NHS. The NHS has gone some way in responding to the challenge but there is more to do and new legislation sets legally binding targets and a means for the Government to monitor progress. This *Briefing* sets out the key points of the new legislation and other initiatives that are helping the NHS to do its bit on climate change.

Background

As one of the largest organisations in Europe, the NHS faces the dual challenge of needing to invest in preventive health to strengthen the resilience of the population and in treatment for the victims of a warmer, more variable climate. The NHS can make a significant contribution to the UK's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and is committed to meeting the Government's ambitious target to cut carbon emissions by at least 80 per cent by 2050, with a minimum reduction of 34 per cent by 2020.

Since our look at the threat of climate change and the implications for both human health and the NHS in *Taking the temperature* in 2007, the NHS has made good progress on addressing the challenge of climate change and in making it part of its everyday work. The Climate Change Act 2008 and new NHS carbon reduction strategy will add momentum to NHS work to date on tackling climate change. And as the recession takes hold and the need for imaginative productivity becomes more important, reducing costs will continue to be a useful by-product of tackling climate change.



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The Climate Change Act

The Climate Change Act became law in November 2008. It is the first legislation of its kind in the world, establishing a long-term legal framework for tackling climate change. The Government believes that the Act will help facilitate the UK’s transition to a low-carbon economy, deliver a long-term, secure energy supply, and put in law targets to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent.

The Act specifically:

- introduces legally binding greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and a system of ‘carbon budgets’, capping emissions over successive five-year periods
- sets out a reporting structure for an assessment of the risks of climate change
- enables the Government to monitor progress to help ensure the UK is better able to adapt to those risks.

The Act contains four overarching pillars, namely:

- creation of a system designed to establish a pathway to reducing emissions up until 2050
- establishing a new independent body – the Committee on Climate Change
- providing powers for Government to provide additional means with which to achieve emissions reductions

- increasing accountability, including Government reporting to Parliament.

Reducing emissions between now and 2050

Statutory targets

The Act creates two statutory targets to reduce CO₂ emissions. Against a 1990 baseline, the Act aims to reduce CO₂ emissions by 34 per cent (this figure has recently been increased from 26 per cent and may further increase to 42 per cent by 2020). In the longer term, the Act sets a target of reducing CO₂ emissions by 80 per cent by 2050 as a fair contribution to global action on climate change.

Carbon budgeting

Government defines carbon budgeting as “a limit on the total quantity of CO₂ emissions over a specified period of time”. The Act introduces five-year carbon budgets to achieve the statutory targets, beginning with the period 2008–12.

Carbon budgets will be based on several factors, including scientific and technical knowledge relating to climate change, energy policy, and economic, fiscal, social and international circumstances. Carbon budgets can only be adjusted with the agreement of Parliament, following advice from the independent Committee on Climate Change. Any emissions reductions which exceed those budgeted for can be ‘banked’ for use in the next budget period.

Committee on Climate Change

A new Committee on Climate Change was established under the Climate Change Act 2008 to advise the Government on setting carbon budgets, and to report to Parliament

each year on the progress made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Chaired by Lord Adair Turner, this new, non-departmental public body will independently assess how the UK can optimally achieve its emissions reductions goals.

Its priorities are to:

- provide independent advice to Government on building a low-carbon economy
- monitor the progress Government makes towards achieving targets in annual progress reports to Parliament
- conduct independent research and analysis into climate change
- engage with representatives interested in climate change from across the UK in order to share research and information on climate change and gain input into our analysis.

Provision of additional powers

The Act provides for two new enabling powers to make it easier to implement new domestic emissions trading schemes. These enabling powers will also make it easier to consolidate and extend new and existing trading schemes.

Accountability

The Government already produces an annual assessment of its progress on greenhouse gas emissions reductions but the Act ensures that the Committee on Climate Change will become involved in this reporting process to maximise independence and credibility. The committee is required to produce an annual report to Parliament on the UK’s progress towards both its budgets and targets, including a five-year compliance statement.

Saving carbon, improving health

The *Saving carbon, improving health* strategy launched in January 2009 with widespread support from NHS organisations and staff. The strategy sets out a pledge for the NHS to become one of England's leading sustainable and low-carbon organisations and to meet the Government's target of an 80 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050.

The strategy says that NHS organisations need to act now because of:

- the new legally binding Government framework and national targets
- the strength of the scientific evidence to act now on climate change
- the health co-benefits now for patients and populations, and for the health system itself
- the importance of cost reductions and energy resilience
- the willingness and commitment of NHS organisations and staff to act now
- the need for the NHS to be a leading public sector exemplar now.

The strategy also identifies the vision and five key actions for delivering on:

'Saving carbon, improving health sets out a pledge for the NHS to become one of England's leading sustainable and low-carbon organisations'

- **energy and carbon management** – every organisation should review its energy and carbon management at board level
- **procurement and food** – every organisation should consider minimising wastage at the buying stage
- **low-carbon travel, transport and access** – every organisation should routinely and systematically review the need for staff, patients and visitors to travel
- **water** – every organisation should ensure efficient use of water by measuring and monitoring its usage
- **waste** – every organisation should monitor, report and set targets on its management of domestic and clinical waste
- **designing the built environment** – built environments should be designed to encourage sustainable development and low-carbon usage in every aspect of their operation
- **organisational and workforce development** – every member of

the NHS workforce should be encouraged and enabled to take action in their workplace

- **role of partnership and networks** – every organisation should consolidate partnership working and make use of its leverage within local frameworks
- **governance** – every organisation should sign up to the Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model and produce a board-approved sustainable development management plan
- **finance** – every organisation should become carbon-literate, carbon-numerate and ensure appropriate investment to meet the commitments required to become part of a low-carbon NHS and in preparation for a carbon tax regime.

NHS Sustainable Development Unit

The NHS Sustainable Development Unit (NHS SDU) for England began work in April 2008. It provides leadership, support and policy input to ensure the NHS in England is the leading public sector organisation in promoting sustainable development and mitigating climate change. Its specific roles are to:

- be a source of leadership, expertise and guidance concerning sustainable development to all NHS organisations in England
- raise awareness across the NHS as to the important responsibilities of, and actions for, the NHS regarding sustainable development and climate change; this includes promoting a culture of measurement and management

"How the NHS behaves – as an employer, a purchaser of goods and services, a manager of transport, energy, waste and water, as a provider of services, as a landholder and commissioner of building work and as an influential neighbour in many communities – can make a big difference to people's health and to the well-being of society, the economy and the environment. Behaving as a good corporate citizen can save money, can benefit population health and can help reduce health inequalities."

Saving carbon, improving health

which will eventually lead to a process of carbon governance

- help shape NHS policy, locally, nationally and internationally that makes promoting sustainable development and adapting to and mitigating climate change both necessary and possible for every NHS organisation
- ensure the very best practice and innovations on sustainability in the NHS and elsewhere are evaluated and costed and the mechanisms for implementation are made fully available to all NHS organisations
- work in partnership with the NHS, government, industry and the third sector to achieve the above.

The Department of Health

The Department of Health Estates and Facilities Division works closely with the NHS SDU in driving forward carbon reduction in the NHS. It has responsibility for supporting the NHS to improve the sustainability of its operations and procurement practice, including support for efforts to reduce carbon emissions. This takes a number of forms:

- interface with other government departments on government policy
- work with other bodies, including commissioners of care, to embed sustainable development indicators and incentives to drive the agenda forward
- provide expertise and technical advice and guidance
- set mandatory energy/carbon efficiency targets 2000–10
- provide health technical memoranda on energy, waste,

water, transport, health and social care buildings

- require BREEAM healthcare score of ‘excellent’ for new buildings or ‘very good’ for refurbishments, plus BREEAM Healthcare XB for the existing operational estate.

Carbon Reduction Commitment Scheme

The Department of Energy and Climate Change is currently consulting on a Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) Scheme – a new government-backed legislative carbon emissions trading scheme. The scheme, to be introduced in April 2010, will cover large business and public sector organisations. It is designed to drive changes in behaviour and infrastructure, generate corporate awareness of the detrimental impacts of carbon emissions, and improve energy management practice. Organisations that meet the criteria to participate – and this is likely to be about a third of NHS trusts – will have to monitor emissions from energy use, report these emissions annually, and purchase and surrender a corresponding number of carbon emission allowances on a ‘cap and trade’ basis. This could mean some trusts losing out financially. Participants’ performance will be published in a league table which will allow comparisons to be made between all organisations providing NHS care. To help prepare for the CRC, NHS trusts can take part in a simulation of the carbon trading scheme run by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU). For more information, contact NHS SDU (see ‘Further information’ on page 6).

‘Trusts’ performance under the Carbon Reduction Commitment Scheme will be published in a league table’

Climate change and Europe

In December 2008, new European legislation was agreed on energy and climate change by EU member states. The legislation aims to deliver on a commitment to meet ambitious EU targets for 2020 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent (rising to 30 per cent if there is an international agreement), increase the use of renewables by 20 per cent and increase energy efficiency by 20 per cent. The Carbon Reduction Commitment is one of many national policies being implemented to respond to these commitments. In fact, much of the environment and climate-related national legislation having implications for the NHS originates from legislation which the government has agreed at EU level.

One of the roles of the NHS European Office (a part of the NHS Confederation) is therefore to keep NHS organisations informed about these EU developments and to seek to influence them in the interest of the NHS. This means that the NHS has an opportunity to contribute its views to EU decision-makers and help shape the climate and environmental policies agreed at EU level. Examples of climate change-related areas where the NHS European Office has been particularly active include green public procurement, energy performance in buildings, and the European Emissions Trading Scheme. For more information about this work, contact the NHS European Office (see ‘Further information’ on page 6).

'Work to tackle climate change should now be part of the everyday work of NHS organisations'

UN Climate Change Conference

Copenhagen is getting ready to host the 15th Conference of the Parties under the United Nations' Climate Change Convention in December. Its goal is to find the answer to the global challenge. As the conference brochure puts it:

"Climate changes are now exceeding our worst fears. Therefore, the world is now facing a giant task. Not only on a government level, but on all levels of society. Government officials, politicians, NGOs, scientists, business people and consumers all have a very important role to play."

NHS Confederation work on climate change

Our work to date includes:

- our *Taking the temperature* report in 2007, which led the way in looking at the threat of climate change and the implications for both human health and the NHS
- our work to influence climate change and sustainability policies at both a national and European level
- conducting regular member surveys to gather views
- setting up a special interest climate change group which will share good practice, pilot new work in this area, and input into work

of the NHS Confederation and its networks

- climate change featuring at our annual conference and exhibition
- supporting the *Sustaining a healthy future* report by the Faculty of Public Health.

Confederation viewpoint

Climate change has for some time been recognised as one of the world's most significant challenges. Climate changes are now exceeding our worst fears but, as one of the largest organisations in Europe, the NHS can make a significant contribution to the UK's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Climate Change Act 2008 makes clear the government's commitment to tackling climate

change and we welcome its legally binding targets and new reporting framework. *Saving carbon, improving health* is also welcome as a means of ensuring the NHS meets the government's target of reducing carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.

Work to tackle climate change should now be part of the everyday work of NHS organisations. Boards could be forgiven for taking their eye off the climate change ball as the deepest recession in living memory takes hold. But this would miss the point. Climate and energy issues are not a luxury we can ignore until the economy recovers. Rather, clean and efficient energy will help us manage the financial challenge in terms of growth, productivity, jobs and security of supply. The 'winners' in the

Questions that boards should be asking

- **Leadership** – has your board discussed the climate change/sustainable development agenda?
- **Strategy** – does your organisation and your local authority have a climate change strategy and action plan and the capacity to adapt?
- **Targets** – is your organisation meeting the mandatory targets for reduction in energy consumption and increasing the energy efficiency of buildings?
- **Partnership** – are you working collaboratively on tackling climate change and improving sustainable development performance with local organisations?
- **Energy** – how much did your organisation spend on energy last year, and what proportion of 'green' electricity was procured? Will the CRC affect your organisation?
- **Buildings** – have you used the BREEAM Environment Assessment Tool (which has replaced NEAT) to assess the impact of your trust's estate on the environment?
- **Procurement** – how many of the goods and services you purchase are sourced sustainably?

'The 'winners' in the recession will be those who are first to become energy efficient and develop energy-smart solutions'

recession will be those who are first to become energy efficient and develop energy-smart solutions. Changing and addressing transport, energy use and waste in the NHS will have a considerable impact on reducing its carbon footprint as well as its costs.

The NHS can and must continue to lead the way in shifting values and expectations and help the UK respond to this enormous

challenge. We look forward to continuing to support our members to do this.

For more information on the issues covered in this *Briefing*, contact stephan.groombridge@nhsconfed.org

Further information

The health effects of climate change in the UK. DH and HPA, 2008

Taking the temperature (NHS Confederation, 2007) and *Saving carbon, improving health* (NHS Confederation briefing 163, July 2008), both available at www.nhsconfed.org/publications

BREEAM: The Environmental Assessment Method For Buildings Around The World: www.breeam.org

NHS Sustainable Development Unit: www.sdu.nhs.uk

The Carbon Trust: www.carbontrust.co.uk

SDC NHS Good Corporate Citizen Self- Assessment Model: www.theccc.org.uk

NHS European Office: www.nhsconfed.org/europe

The NHS Confederation

The NHS Confederation is the only independent membership body for the full range of organisations that make up today's NHS. Our ambition is a health system that delivers first-class services and improved health for all. We work with our members to ensure that we are an independent driving force for positive change by:

- influencing policy, implementation and the public debate
- supporting leaders through networking, sharing information and learning
- promoting excellence in employment.

Further copies can be obtained from:

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