

Greening Healthcare: How Today's Climate-Focused Clinicians Are Transforming the System

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Several decades ago, a small but determined group called *Nurses for the Environment* - <https://www.nursesfortheenvironment.com.au> began pushing hospitals to rethink their waste practices. Their message was simple but radical for the time: healthcare can protect patients and the planet. They advocated for recycling, reusing safe materials, and reducing unnecessary waste — long before sustainability became a mainstream concern. Back then, strict infection-control policies and a culture of disposability made change difficult. But today, the landscape is shifting. New research,

innovative waste-management practices, and a growing movement of climate-conscious clinicians are helping reshape healthcare into a sector that heals without harming.

We explore how far we've come — and how organisations like Doctors for the Environment Australia, the Climate and Health Alliance, and the Alliance of Nurses for a Healthy Environment are driving the next wave of change.

- From Landfill to Living Soil: Food Waste Gets a Second Life

Hospitals generate enormous amounts of food waste every day. Traditionally, most of it went straight to landfill. Now, some facilities are sending food scraps to worm farms and composting operations, turning waste into nutrient-rich soil instead of methane emissions. These programs show what's possible when hospitals embrace circular-economy thinking. Waste becomes a resource, not a burden — and the environmental benefits are immediate. Read a recent Australian report here: https://endfoodwaste.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2507_EFWCRC_119_Final-Report.pdf

- Reusable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): A Post-Pandemic Breakthrough



The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the environmental cost of single-use protective equipment. In response, researchers and health systems began exploring safe ways to launder and reuse certain types of PPE. Reusable gowns and protective clothing are now being trialled and adopted in some settings. This shift challenges the long-held assumption that "single-use equals safer." With proper sterilisation protocols, reusable PPE can meet clinical standards while dramatically reducing environmental impact. A study on reusable PPE and pressure sores can be found here:

<https://www.hospitalhealth.com.au/content/facility-admin/article/reusing-medical-equipment-is-good-for-the-planet-but-is-it-safe--1374275839>

The New Leaders: Climate-Focused Health Organisations

A new generation of health professionals is stepping up to advocate for climate-conscious healthcare. Three organisations in particular are helping to lead the charge:

- Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) - <https://www.dea.org.au/>



DEA brings together medical professionals who recognise that environmental damage directly harms human health. They advocate for climate action, sustainable healthcare systems, and policies that protect both people and the planet.

- Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) - <https://www.caha.org.au/>



**CLIMATE AND
HEALTH
ALLIANCE**

CAHA is a powerful coalition of health organisations working to position climate change as a central health issue. They support sustainable hospital initiatives, influence policy, and educate the public about the health impacts of a warming world.

- Alliance of Nurses for a Healthy Environment (ANHE) - <https://envirn.org/>



ANHE empowers nurses to take action on environmental health issues. Their work spans education, advocacy, and community engagement — recognising that nurses are often the first to witness the health impacts of pollution and climate change.

Environmental health *is* human health. Air pollution, extreme heat, contaminated water, and climate-driven disasters all contribute to illness and strain healthcare systems. By reducing its own environmental impact, the health sector can lead by example and help prevent the very conditions that make people sick. The early work of Nurses for the Environment laid the foundation. Today, with stronger evidence and broader public awareness, meaningful change is finally within reach.

Whether you're a clinician, administrator, student, or community member, you can play a role in transforming healthcare into a force for environmental good.

Here's how to get started:
