

The healthcare sector is a significant contributor to our national carbon footprint, producing 7% of Australia's total emissions.

But while there has been some progress in reducing emissions through better utilisation of renewable energy, wastewater management and reducing energy consumption, much of this ignores the very real environmental impact of delivering clinical care. This can include the use of medical devices, consumables, and pharmaceuticals.

Released today by the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association's (AHHA) Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research, the Issues Brief '[Decarbonising clinical care in Australia](#)' is co-authored by 2022 HEAL Scholar Dr Kristen Pickles (University of Sydney). The HEAL Scholar is sponsored by the Healthy Environment and Lives (HEAL) Network, an NHMRC-funded initiative creating a multidisciplinary, nationally focused, collaborative network of researchers on climate and health across Australia.

'It's estimated that only 30% of our healthcare system's carbon footprint is due to building energy, water, and waste pollution, with a great deal more coming from clinical care delivery,' says AHHA Chief Executive Kylie Woolcock.

'In looking at the ways we can reduce our carbon footprint across clinical activities, we also have the added benefit of improving the value of care provided. By identifying and removing sources of low-value care, we can reduce avoidable emissions from the health sector in a quick and direct way.

'For instance, strategies to reduce unnecessary pathology testing and switching to products with a lower carbon footprint like dry powder inhalers from metered dose inhalers can have a substantial effect of lowering emissions, without compromising care.

'We also need to reform how we measure and report on our carbon footprint from healthcare goods and services.

'Currently, much of this data is not being collected at a national level. We need more information to better understand where emissions are being produced, not just at the energy consumption and other on-site measures, but throughout the healthcare supply chain.

'The collection of more detailed data on the lifecycle carbon footprint of our health system could improve the carbon literacy of key decision-makers in healthcare. Enabling them to make informed clinical decisions, and investment and disinvestment decisions in high value, low carbon healthcare.'

This Brief highlights the gaps in understanding of the healthcare sector's contribution to our overall carbon footprint, in particular from clinical care. It addresses how better data collection and reporting can be used to inform and incentivise sector-wide reform, for a more environmentally sustainable and high-quality Australian healthcare system.

The online version of this [media release](#) and the Issues Brief '[Decarbonising clinical care in Australia](#)' can be found on the AHHA website.

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association is the national peak body for public and not-for-profit healthcare.

Media enquiries: Kylie Woolcock, Chief Executive, AHHA
0410 625 830, ceo@ahha.asn.au