

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
PR62
Ymateb gan Iechyd Gwyrdd Cymru / Evidence from Green Health Wales



Green Health Wales Iechyd Gwyrdd Cymru

Dear Committee,

We, Green Health Wales, a network of health workers across Wales who recognise that the climate and ecological emergency is a health emergency are writing to outline our priorities for the committee from the health perspective. We aim to Connect, Learn & Transform our healthcare services to be climate smart and environmentally sustainable.

We are proud that The Senedd became the first parliament in the World to vote in favour of declaring a climate emergency in 2019 ⁽¹⁾ and subsequently put in place binding legislation, ^(1, 2, 3) strategic approaches ^(4,5) and ministerial ambitions ⁽⁶⁾ to drive carbon reduction activity in Wales. We are also proud to have the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 in Wales, as we all have a responsibility to achieve a healthier Wales for our future generations.

Green Health Wales' vision is sustainable healthcare that protects the health of people and the planet and we hope to outline how we believe, the committee can help to contribute to this, as part of a healthy, just and green recovery from the pandemic.

Transform our NHS Wales to a Sustainable healthcare system

In 2009, The Lancet reported that 'climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st Century' having the potential to undermine the last 50 years of global health gains in public health. ^(7,8)

The Climate Emergency is a public health emergency, but the healthcare sector itself currently contributes to the problem. If the global health care sector were a country, it would be the fifth-largest greenhouse gas emitter on the planet.⁽⁹⁾ That’s why we believe that health care driven strategy to climate change and the environment is so important as few industries have to directly deal with the outcome of their emissions.

Sustainable, climate resilient health systems offer the mechanism to break this devastating vicious cycle.

Sustainable healthcare is a holistic approach not just about decarbonisation, but also addressing other waste streams such as water and air pollution which contribute to poor health. It considers how to deliver quality healthcare today, without compromising health in the future. Climate-smart healthcare also challenges us to safeguard our patients against environmental risks, including climate change.

We think the Welsh Government must take emergency action to transform society and the economy in order to rapidly reduce emissions and restore nature, this transformation will lead to vast health benefits. The environmental crisis demands from the Welsh Government a similar emergency response to what we have seen from the health care sector during the pandemic.

Green Health Wales’ 11 recommendations for the committee are outlined below;

- 1. Ensure a healthy climate is central to COVID-19 recovery plans**
- 2. Put health at the heart of climate change, environment and infrastructure policy and recognise the health co-benefits of climate action**
- 3. Restore the foundation of human health: Nature**
- 4. Build health resilience to climate change**
- 5. Be guided by a prudent health care approach**
- 6. Mobilise and support the health community to take climate action**
- 7. Utilise health care to lead by example**
- 8. Re-think health finances**
- 9. Invest resources to decarbonise NHS Wales**
- 10. Create “Green Health Jobs”**
- 11. Think long term, invest in the future and planetary health**

Ensure a healthy climate is central to COVID-19 recovery plans

- Ensure a healthy, just recovery from COVID-19

- Transfer funds to those most in need and to low-income countries to help them achieve the necessary mitigation and adaptation methods
- Ensure health expert input into economic stimulus packages
- Utilise pandemic stimulus packages for climate resilient health system research, innovation and implementation and for surveillance of climate sensitive diseases
- Adopt a One Health approach to sustainable development and COVID-19 recovery plans in Wales

Action on the climate and nature crisis cannot wait for the pandemic to end. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the link between a healthy planet and the health of people. It has brought into spotlight the well-known social injustices and health inequalities faced by the people of Wales. The [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) encourages us to address health inequalities and poverty alongside the climate crisis. COVID-19 has however exemplified healthcare's ability to adapt and transform services in an agile way to meet the needs of the populations.

A just and healthy recovery will contribute to a more equal and globally responsible Wales, we must also do more to support the rest of the World and share solutions and finances where they are needed, as with the COVID-19 pandemic we are as strong as our weakest member. We applaud the Welsh Government for sharing £7.2m worth of PPE equipment with Namibia. Further Global co-operation is needed to tackle the nature and health emergencies, so that rush for cleaner technologies does not cost more environmental destruction or human exploitation.

Resources

- <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/actionables-for-a-healthy-recovery-from-covid-19>
- <https://healthyrecovery.net/>
- <https://theindependentpanel.org/mainreport/>
- CMO Special Report 2021 <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-01/chief-medical-officer-for-wales-special-report.pdf>

Put health at the heart of Climate Change, Environment, and infrastructure policy

- Health ministries and leaders to be included in all climate decision making processes

- Strengthen and support implementation of the health in all policies approach
- Include those with health expertise in all climate decisions
- Ensure that evidenced based health data drives climate policy change, prioritising interventions with the largest health, social and economic gains
- Align climate and health goals
- Integrate health into all climate mitigation and adaptation plans
- Recognise the optimisation of health co-benefits of climate action

Climate change is not just the greatest health threat it is also the greatest health opportunity of this century, millions of lives can be prevented from the health benefits of more ambitious climate action. If health is included in all climate policies in the UK by 2040 this would prevent thousands of deaths every year, up to 6,000 deaths from reducing air pollution, 100,000 from improving diet and 38,000 from increased physical activity. Other health benefits include high quality jobs and improved housing, which are important determinants of health. These health benefits lead to economic benefits that outweigh the initial cost of climate policies in the form of reduced health care costs and a more productive workforce. To realise these benefits policy makers must break out of their silos and collaborate.

Resources

- <https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196%2820%2930249-7/fulltext>
- <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/344733>

Restore the foundation of human health: nature

- Embed nature-based solutions for climate and health goals
- Implement a “Planetary Health” and “One Health” approach to reduce the risk of infectious disease emergence at its source
- Improve equal access to green space for mental health benefits
- Enable “green prescribing” nature to those most in need by connecting nature restoration work and nature networks with social prescribing networks

Healthy ecosystems are fundamental to human health and well-being. Economies are a product of healthy societies, which are a product of the natural environment on which they depend. Restoring nature and embedding nature-based solutions have many co-benefits for both climate and health goals. Nature based solutions have the potential to achieve over one third of CO₂ emission reductions by 2030. Welsh Government should have an understanding of a “Planetary Health” and “One Health” approach to fully realise these benefits and

recognise that human health is connected to health of both animals and the environment. Human pressures on the environment increase the risk of emerging infectious diseases, of which over 60% originate from animals. Therefore, plans to reduce risk of future epidemics must go further upstream than early detection and control of outbreaks to also lessen human impact on the environment and reduce the risk at its source. Almost 25% of deaths worldwide could be prevented if action is taken to tackle the environmental determinants of human health.

Nature and access to green space is also important to people's health and well-being, and it will be important to consider how mental health benefits can be maximised from environment and infrastructure policies and ensure access is equitable, particularly to those most in need. Linking nature restoration work with social prescribing networks so clinicians can easily sign post patients most in need to areas of green space, as part of a "Green prescribing" approach to improve our patient's mental health will be important to fully realise the health benefits of environmental policies. It will be important to highlight any models for effective green prescribing taking place in Wales and help spread and scale this across the nation.

Build health resilience to climate change

- Ensure health and social care in Wales is a safe haven for our communities from the storm of climate change
- Prepare healthcare sites, buildings and supply chains to be adaptive and resilient to climate change consequences such as flooding and sea level rises
- Ensure health is the core of all climate adaptation plans
- Equip health workers, ministers and planners with access to data information on climate risk
- Improve health professionals' capacity to recognise and respond to the health impacts of climate change
- Ensure health facilities remain cool in a warmer climate
- Ensure health facilities are resilient from power outages and our medical equipment and supplies safe from flooding
- Integrate climate mitigation into adaptation plans
- Help support and fund resilient health systems in low and middle income countries

Health care as-well as being on the frontlines of the pandemic is also on the frontlines facing the health impacts of climate change. In health care facilities around the World the climate emergency has been a simultaneous and convergent health emergency affecting health workers and their patients. The health impacts of climate change include the direct impacts and injuries associated with extreme weather events, changing geographic range of infectious

diseases, and the indirect effects on wider determinants of health, clean air, food, water, safety and security. These impacts are felt unequally on the poorest, youngest, oldest and those with existing health conditions, often those least responsible.

Health care facilities and workforce are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate impacts. Flooding in hospitals in London recently led to patients being evacuated, we have also seen first-hand how overheating can be common in hospitals in Wales and this can impact both the capacity of health staff to give care and the ability of our patients to make a speedy recovery. Our growingly old health infrastructure, poor insulation and ventilation is often ill prepared for climate change and compromises our ability to care for our patients.

Ensuring that health is at the core of all plans for climate adaptation and resilience, will be essential to achieving a more resilient and healthier Wales. 67% of global cities public health assets and infrastructure is expected to be seriously compromised by climate change.

Alongside ensuring health infrastructure is more resilient, health professionals' capacity to recognise and respond to the health impacts of climate change must be strengthened.

Resources

- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/operational-framework-for-building-climate-resilient-health-systems>

Be guided by a prudent health care approach

'the victories won by preventive medicine are much the most important for mankind'
Aneurin Bevan (NHS Founder)

- Prioritise healthcare investments to those most at risk
- Ensure inclusion and equal access to health services
- Prioritise reducing social, health inequalities and tackling non-communicable diseases
- Improve the capacity for pandemic preparedness
- Maintain universal health coverage in light of a changing and increasing disease burden

Climate change impacts are more likely to affect those in our population who are also most at risk of health and social inequalities. Ensuring that health is an integral and integrated part of climate action in Wales will also require further investment in public health and prevention.

Preventing ill health by empowering patients to care for their own health and well-being and tackling the root causes of illness and inequality is an important part of reducing acute health

care demand and part of a more sustainable health care system. These public health improvements would reduce the need for healthcare and so are an effective way to reduce the carbon footprint and environmental impact of healthcare itself. Healthier communities are also more resilient to climate change.

Utilising lessons from health care's response to the pandemic, could act as a useful tool in thinking about how best the committee should respond to the climate emergency. Including prudent principles of health care- decision making through co-production with public, caring for those with greatest health need first, doing no harm and using evidence based practices.

Resources

- <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/securing-health-and-well-being-for-future-generations.pdf>

Mobilise and support the health community on climate action to meet the climate crisis through the vision 'Learn, Connect, Transform'

- Help support health care staff to realise their vision of a Green Health Wales
- Ensure knowledge, skills and attitudes for climate action is embedded in all education and training curricula

We have seen during the pandemic how resilient and adaptive the health community is to dealing with a health emergency. The health community must be given the tools to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. There are three cited failures to planetary health (achieving human health alongside the natural systems that support them), an empathy failure, a knowledge failure and an implementation failure. The vision of sustainable healthcare through "connect, learn, transform" will be important to overcome these.

Connect- Staff are networked to connect locally and with healthcare professionals internationally and to share best practice and enable rapid evidence-based scale and spreading of good practice. As happened in the COVID-19 pandemic the wider society can support those on the frontline through systems convening for example with innovation and digital solutions.

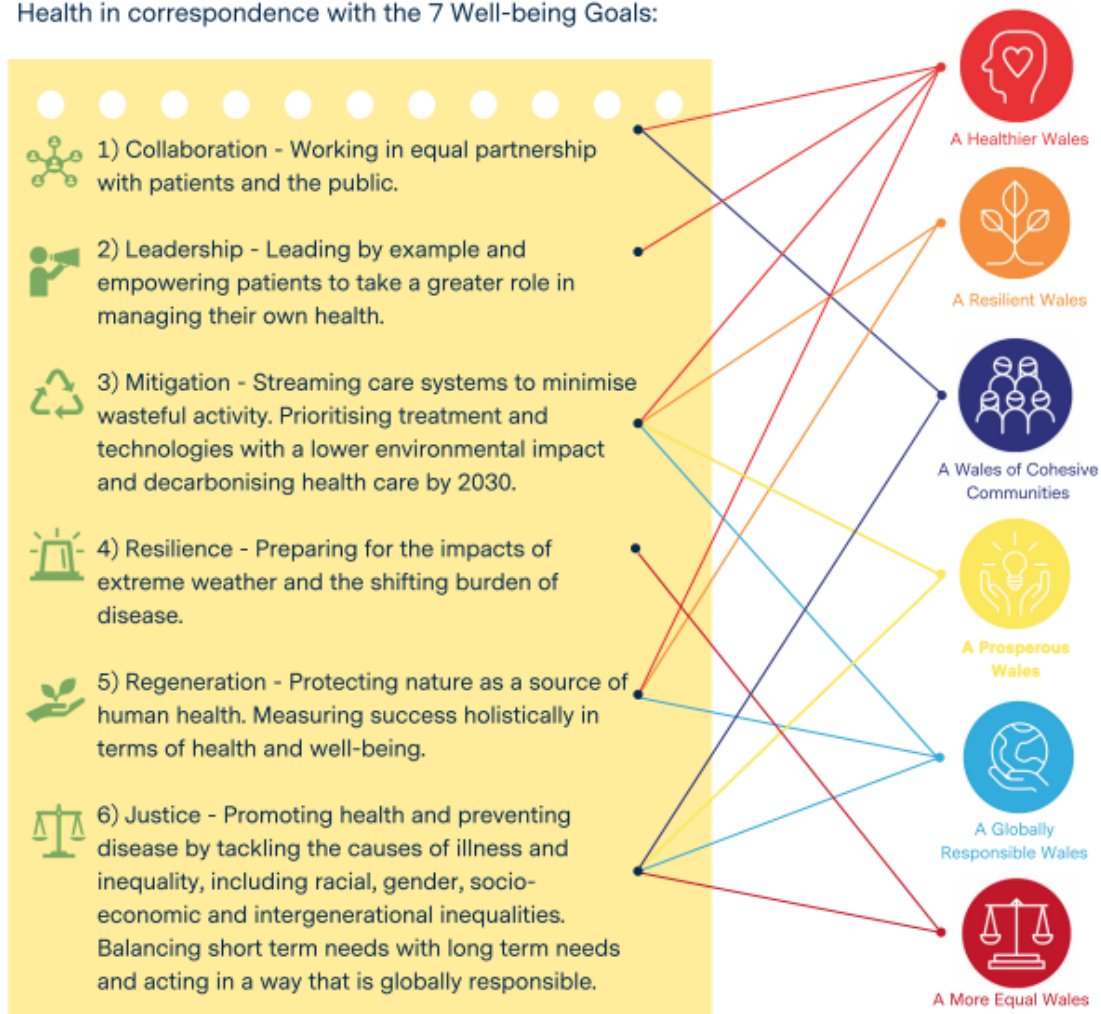
Learn- Every person in the healthcare community is empowered with the knowledge of Sustainable Quality Improvement, how to practice sustainably and have an understanding

of the impact of decisions made today have on the planet and future generations. We become carbon literate, have planetary health embedded into our understanding of human health.

Transform- The system will be transformed, we redefine the value, to encompass environmental, social and financial value (The triple bottom line) but to also maintain or improve outcomes for patients and populations.

It will be important to develop how **Principles for Planetary Health** can contribute towards the well-being goals, e.g. like Ysbyty Gwynedd Green Group's principles

Ysbyty Gwynedd Green Group has formulated Six Principles for Planetary Health in correspondence with the 7 Well-being Goals:



<https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Ysbyty-Gwynedd-English-2.pdf>

Utilise healthcare to lead by example

Throughout the pandemic health care staff across Wales have continued to go above and beyond and implement projects to improve the environmental sustainability of their practice, demonstrating it is possible to work on multiple priorities at once, being on the frontlines of the pandemic but also tackling the nature and climate emergencies, Welsh Government should follow their example. Healthcare staff are one of the most trusted communities in society. The healthcare sector is leading by example, acting as a lever for change, as we shift to a more sustainable healthcare system we can influence healthier changes across the rest of society. Ensuring that climate change, environment and infrastructure policy focuses on health care, we think will help mobilise the healthy, sustainable behaviour changes that are required from the rest of society to improve and protect their health. Clean and green infrastructure, can help us save lives and tackle non-communicable diseases which cause 70% of global diseases. Building sustainable health care requires cross-sectoral co-ordination.

Food

- Food systems that do not add to climate change, support healthier diets and reduce premature deaths from non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, heart attacks and strokes.
- Promote healthy, sustainably sourced, plant-based food in healthcare settings.

Energy

- Fossil fuel combustion leads to air pollution that causes a third of deaths from cancer and contributes to strokes, heart disease and lung disease.
- Ensure consistent public health messaging and implement health warnings on point of sale of all fossil fuel energy in Wales.
- Ensure health care is supplied with 100% renewable energy.
- Retrofitting hospitals and homes is essential to reduce fuel poverty and protect patients and staff from heat and cold.

Transport

- Currently 81% of adolescents are not sufficiently physically active, re-thinking transport infrastructure must improve physical activity and improve health.
- Public transport links must not be exclusive and must improve access to health care, as-well as other critical services for those most in need, including for hospital staff at times they need them for shift work.
- Transport systems to hospitals and health care must not contribute to air pollution, we must rethink how patients, staff and those visiting hospitals travel.

- Revolutionise healthcare so that more care is in the community, more staff can work remotely.
- Ensure that fast charging is available for emergency vehicles across Wales as the internal combustion engine is phased out of our emergency service fleets.

Waste

- Ensure that medical waste does not contribute to environmental contamination or degradation.
- Achieve a truly circular economy in health care, support the innovation required for health care to move away from zero single use plastics and extract the maximum value from all materials

Biodiversity

- Promote green space and health in hospitals, ensuring those who visit and work in hospitals have access to green space for recovery, healing and rest.
- Improve biodiversity on NHS sites

Clinical

- Ensure that every person in health care has a role to play in improving sustainability and leading by example at work. Every member of the health and social care sector has an important role in tackling the nature and climate emergencies. We are a large employer and staff are also patients themselves. Each specialty in medicine and surgery present unique opportunities to transform practice to be more climate smart and environmentally sustainable e.g. Gases in anaesthetics, inhalers in respiratory, waste in surgery, PPE in infection control.
- Help us to promote hospital wide Green Groups at each NHS Wales site and help us to promote the development of clinical networks that span the length and breadth of Wales for every health care specialty and discipline.

Resources

- <https://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/>
- <https://wellcome.org/reports/connections-between-climate-and-health>

Rethink health finances

- Cancel debt to hospitals and health boards
- Invest more health finance in prevention
- Invest more climate finance in health
- Measure success in terms of health and well-being
- End all support for fossil fuel energy, as part of a just transition

Cancelling debt to hospitals and health boards will give them the capacity to consider the real cost of providing health care, including the environmental and social costs, whilst giving them the opportunity to build back better and respond to the health emergency of the pandemic, inequality, climate change and biodiversity loss. Nationally, this also means moving away from GDP towards more holistic measures of well-being (as New Zealand has done) as a measure of long-term success and global responsibility.

Globally only 0.5% of climate finance is spent on health and only 3% of health finance spent on prevention. ⁽¹⁰⁾ It will be important to invest climate funding into health and prevention. Plugging this climate, health and prevention gap in Wales will help with partnership working for a Teams Wales approach, help public bodies implement the Well-being of Future Generation Acts five ways of working of integration, involvement, collaboration, long term and prevention, and can help to mobilise the health workforce of today to tackle the greatest health threat of this century.

Health institutions are already leading by example with their own finances and have divested more than US \$42 billion of assets from fossil fuels and others should join them. The use of fossil fuels kills 7 million people every year and economic and health cost of air pollution is equivalent to 3.3% of global GDP. The Welsh Government must follow health care's lead and end all support for fossil fuel energy, domestically and abroad.

Invest in the resources needed to decarbonise NHS Wales

- Develop leadership in decarbonising health care systems
- Invest in the necessary resources for health to go “above and beyond” the decarbonisation strategic delivery plan for NHS Wales as part of net zero public sector by 2030
- Achieve a zero emissions and environmentally sustainable NHS Wales by 2040
- Develop a roadmap for decarbonising primary care and social care
- Ensure supply chain alignment with decarbonisation goals, recognising that to achieve this will require engagement with actors beyond the health sector
- Sign up NHS Wales to the UN's RaceToZero programme

- Integrate climate resilience and sustainability into the decarbonisation of health systems

Wales has committed to be a carbon neutral public sector by 2030 and NHS Wales' Decarbonisation Strategic Delivery Plan 2021-2030 was published March 2021 and aligns to the ambition for the public sector to be 'net zero' by 2030 as part of a “teams Wales” approach. However, this approach for health care falls short, relying on the proposed negative emissions of other parts of the public sector to compensate for NHS Wales emissions and doesn't fully consider the environmental impact of care taking place in the community and primary care.

NHS Wales, as the largest public sector organisation in Wales, has a key role in delivering this change. The carbon footprint of NHS Wales is over 1million tonnes of CO₂e. The global health care sector is responsible for around 4.4% of greenhouse gases. We feel it is important to align our approach with the international health sector who are growingly ambitious to achieve zero emissions and environmentally sustainable health care by 2040. Ensuring that health care in Wales is part of the UN RaceToZero programme will demonstrate further commitment to achieve this aim and work internationally, it will allow all health boards to participate in the health care climate challenge that was launched alongside the Paris Agreement in 2015 and it will also allow all hospital Green Groups in Wales to be part of the Global Green and Healthy Hospital Network. This international collaboration can help drive the pace and scale of change as good practices can be rapidly adopted to where they are needed. This international response will be important to decarbonising procurement in health care which is currently the biggest part of our emissions from the supply chain. Reducing emissions of health care is part of our professional duty to do no harm and protect public health.

To achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 we need to transform our approach to healthcare, the healthcare community needs to be informed about how we can best decarbonise the delivery of healthcare and mitigate against our carbon footprint. As such a large employer the health care community is also an anchor for health and well-being, with a mission to heal and do no harm, the commitment and dedication of health care staff means that health can be at the forefront of our approach to tackling the climate emergency.

Resources

- <https://healthclimateaction.org/racetozero>
- <https://healthclimateaction.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Global%20Road%20Map%20for%20Health%20Care%20Decarbonization.pdf>

Invest in “Green health jobs”

- Tackling the climate and nature emergencies must be a tool to grow and retain the health workforce in Wales
- Innovation posts in Climate Smart Health Care at each hospital in Wales
- Sustainability specialist in each health board, to monitor and govern progress
- Sustainability co-ordinators in each health board, to collaborate and bring people together
- Fellow posts in sustainable health care open to all health workers across Wales
- Integrate sustainability roles into existing health care jobs e.g. clinical sustainability leads, executive sustainability leads and green champions.

Tackling climate change is often quoted by politicians as a way to generate a “Green Industrial Revolution” and millions of “Green Jobs”. In health care, to build this capacity to tackle the climate emergency, we need “Green Health Jobs”. Currently the sustainability work in NHS Wales is done by already stretched NHS staff working in their own time which is unsustainable. The work and time put into Green Health Wales is voluntary from health care staff across Wales. In NHS England their ‘Greener NHS’ has a leadership team of over 100 headed by a Chief Sustainability Officer. Tackling the climate emergency must be a tool to grow and retain the health workforce but without necessary investment, it could risk further overwhelming compassionate and dedicated health workers who continue to tackle with backlogs of care from the COVID19 pandemic. Investing in specific roles will mean that the capacity for health care to respond and lead by example will be improved, this could also lead to new breakthrough innovations in sustainable and climate smart health care delivery in Wales and contribute to a more prosperous and healthier Wales. This will help us grow and retain the health work force and ensure NHS Wales remains an attractive place for health workers to live and train. Building this momentum and capacity in health care will be important to help health care lead by example, create, healthy and sustainable changes across the rest of society and achieve the goals Welsh Government have for a net zero public sector by 2030. Jobs are an important determinant of people’s health, Green Health Jobs in health care should be no different. Long term and sustainable to allow individuals the safety and security of pensions and those working on vital work of sustainability in health care a secure regular income. It will be vital to ensure this capacity and protected time for health workers at all levels to innovate and enable the change required at every aspect of care delivery.

Resources

- [What are the green health sector jobs of the future? - UK Health Alliance](#)

Think long term, Invest in the future and planetary health

- Invest in climate, health and planetary health research in Wales and link evidence up with evidence-based policy work
- Ensure Welsh medical schools integrate planetary health and climate change into medical curricula and that those graduating can take the planetary health pledge

There remain large knowledge gaps in how climate change impacts human health, particularly at a local level, and how large health co-benefits are from climate action, this will be important to ensure that climate, environment and infrastructure policy is guided by the best available science. The case for more ambitious action can be strengthened by committing to monitor and measure the health co-benefits of all climate, environment and infrastructure interventions.

Final remarks on the climate ministers' priorities

We appreciate the ambition and collaborative approach of the priorities set out by the minister and welcome the development particularly the Clean Air Act for Wales and tree planting ambitions.

We believe as health workers our trusted voice highlighting the importance of taking action to our patients and communities as a health priority, would be exemplified if we are enabled and supported more by Welsh Government to lead by example in health care settings.

This will be important to help gain public consent and approval for faster climate action from further afield as-well including the UK Government and the international community at COP26.

We hope to help Wales tackle the climate and nature emergencies at the pace and scale needed to protect our patient's health. Green Health Wales takes a systems view approach of the challenge and we look forward to collaborating going forward.

Thank you for considering Green Health Wales' recommendations for the climate, environment and infrastructure committee.



Green Health Wales Iechyd Gwyrdd Cymru

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