

Healthy futures: sustainable development opportunities for the NHS

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Sustainable
Development Commission



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Healthy Futures

Sustainable development opportunities for the NHS

As the nation's provider of health services, an employer of over one million people, a major purchaser and consumer of energy and resources, the NHS has the potential to make a significant contribution to sustainable social, environmental and economic development. In turn, sustainable development offers the NHS the opportunity to spend, consume and behave in ways which result in a more efficient service, healthier working and living conditions and, in the longer term, a healthier population.

This publication, the first in a series, launches the Sustainable Development Commission's new *Healthy Futures* project. The Department of Health has provided one year's funding for the appointment of a Team Leader to lead this work, which aims to help promote sustainable development within the NHS. We will explore ways of helping the NHS maximise its positive contribution to the environment, society and the economy, and look at the benefits that this approach offers the NHS.

A great deal of valuable work is already being done at all levels to promote sustainable development and help the NHS become a better corporate citizen. If you are involved in any of these initiatives, we want to hear from you.



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Making a sustainable contribution

The NHS clearly has a direct impact on the lives of millions of patients, staff and visitors every day. If you add to this the NHS's huge spending power (it spends over £1,000 every second); its environmental impact (it produces 600,000 tonnes of waste and **7.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide every year**); its role as a commissioner of buildings; and the fact that the NHS is a major cause of road travel, its impact is felt well beyond hospital wards

and waiting rooms. Indeed, the NHS has the potential to influence and enhance local social, environmental and economic conditions. For example, **through sustainable use of its resources, the NHS can help support local employment and regeneration, thereby strengthening local economies and communities.** And through energy efficiency measures and green travel plans, the NHS can reduce carbon emissions and other kinds of damage to the environment.

Benefits for the NHS

Maximising the NHS's contribution to sustainable development will also bring significant benefits to the NHS:



The NHS produces 600,000 tonnes of waste every year.

1 Health benefits

Sustainable development can help achieve healthier living and working conditions which in turn lead to healthier lives.

2 Managing demand on health services

Improved health and reduced risks of injury and disease, which can be achieved through sustainable development, will help to manage demand on the NHS.

3 Long term viability

Reduced expenditure, healthier local populations and reduced demand for services will ease pressures on health service providers – this will help to build a more efficient and effective NHS in the long term.

4 Financial benefits

More efficient use of energy and resources and reduced waste will help reduce costs.

The NHS spends over £1000 per second.



THE BIGGER PICTURE

Our *Healthy Futures* project is about making the links between health services and the bigger picture. In particular we aim to help the NHS explore how its **food purchasing policies and capital development programme can promote improved health and sustainable development.** Our work will include:

- gathering examples of best practice
- exploring how best practice can be implemented in Trusts across the UK
- building knowledge
- bringing NHS Trusts together to learn from each other
- working closely with the Department of Health in England, health departments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and local authorities, to help integrate sustainable development thinking into health policies.

WHY FOOD AND BUILDINGS?

We have chosen to focus initially on NHS food procurement and NHS buildings, as these are two areas of major spending with a strong contribution to make to improved health and environmental, social and economic sustainability.

There is strong evidence of the direct link between diet and health, and there are also wider links between food and health. Every year the NHS serves over 300 million meals and its annual shopping list includes 1.3 million chicken legs, 12.3 million loaves of bread, 13.5 million kg of potatoes and 250,000 litres of orange juice – **impacts on the economy, the environment, society and public health occur at every point in the production, processing and distribution of all this food and drink.**

There is also growing evidence to suggest that building design can significantly affect patient recovery time and staff morale, as well as reduce the impact on global climate change.

The NHS buys 1.3 million chicken legs every year.

However, food and buildings are just examples of areas where **making more sustainable choices could enable services to run more efficiently, improve public health, enhance the local environment and economy and reduce the demand on the NHS.** Whatever we learn about these two areas will be relevant to other aspects of the health sector, as well as to the wider public sector and other organisations.

Healthy communities

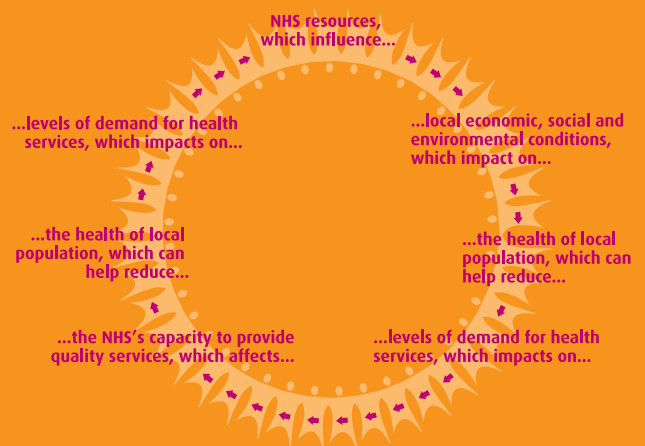
We aim not just to help improve the quality and sustainability of health services, but to promote investment in keeping people healthy. The way the NHS works and spends has an impact on the wider health of the population, as well as that of patients and staff. For example, decisions about where to locate a new hospital, how to provide transport to and from health services, how to manage waste and energy, and

whom to employ, all impact on the local environment, community and economy. And these effects, in the longer term, influence the health of local people.

We shall therefore explore the potential effects of NHS food purchasing and the NHS building programme on the causes of illness in local communities, and ways in which NHS corporate spending can help to improve health.

A virtuous circle:
where patterns of behaviour that promote sustainable development have health benefits, and measures to improve health also contribute to sustainable development.

Source: *Claiming the Health Dividend: Unlocking the benefits of NHS spending*, King's Fund, 2002



WORKING WITH OTHERS

We are aware that health departments, the NHS, health agencies and others, are busy exploring, at a national, regional and local level, ways of enabling the NHS to become a better corporate citizen.

There are many relevant initiatives, which start to make the links between health, stronger communities, and sustainable development, such as the *Better Hospital Food Programme*, the NHS Estates guidance on sustainable development, the NHS Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT), the Greencode environmental tool, Scotland's diet action plan – *Eating for Health*, the

Department of Health's *5 A Day Programme*, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' *Sustainable Food Procurement Initiative*, the Welsh Assembly's initiative to explore ways of strengthening local Welsh food supply to the public sector, and the *Well Being in Wales* document. We are keen to make links with these and other projects and we hope to work closely with people across the NHS, the UK health departments and local authorities. **We will be collaborating with the King's Fund on much of this work.**

Spreading best practice

We are currently drawing together examples of best practice in the NHS, particularly in relation to food procurement and the NHS building programme.

Does your work contribute to sustainable development? Are your actions driven by environmental, economic and social considerations? If so, and if you are happy to share your knowledge and experiences with us, we would like to hear from you. Please contact either Susannah Senior or Victoria Read:

Sustainable Development Commission

A508, 5th Floor, Romney House, Tufton Street, London SW1P 3RA

Tel: 020 7082 8840 (Susannah), or 020 7082 8842 (Victoria)

Email: susannah.senior@defra.gsi.gov.uk; victoria.read@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Further copies of this publication are available from the address above, or from our website: www.sd-commission.gov.uk

Your case studies will help inform **future publications**.



What is the Sustainable Development Commission?

The Sustainable Development Commission, chaired by Jonathon Porritt (Director of Forum for the Future), is the Government's **independent advisor on sustainable development**, reporting directly to the Prime Minister and the First Ministers of the Devolved Administrations. Our mission is to **inspire** government, the economy and society to embrace sustainable development as the central organising principle. Anna Coote (Director of Health Policy at the King's Fund) chairs the *Healthy Futures* steering group. The other members of the group are Valerie Ellis (Member of the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee), Brian Hanna (President of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health), and Richard Wakeford (Chief Executive of the Countryside Agency). Our website – www.sd-commission.gov.uk – includes a full list of Commissioners.

Our principles for sustainable development

- Putting sustainable development at the centre, as the organising principle for societies
- Valuing nature and working within the constraints of the natural world
- Fair shares for all
- Making the polluter pay
- Good governance and effective and participative systems of governance and institutions
- Adopting a precautionary approach, whereby potentially damaging activities are fully evaluated so as to avoid or minimise risks

Resources

- *Claiming the Health Dividend: Unlocking the benefits of NHS spending*, King's Fund, 2002
- *Eating for Health: A diet action plan for Scotland*, Scottish Executive, 1996
- *Food Procurement for Health and Sustainable Development*, SDC, 2002
- *New Environmental Strategy for the National Health Service*, NHS Estates, 2002
- *Sustainable Development in the NHS*, NHS Estates, 2001
- *Tackling Health Inequalities: A programme for action*, Dept. of Health, 2003
- *The NHS Plan: A plan for investment, a plan for reform*, Dept. of Health, 2000
- *Well Being in Wales*, Welsh Assembly Government, 2002
- For details of the *Better Hospital Food Programme* see www.betterhospitalfood.com
- For information about the NHS Environmental Assessment Tool and the Greencode tool see www.nhsestates.gov.uk/sustainable_development/ and www.show.scot.nhs.uk/pef/guest/energy/greencode.htm
- For details of Defra's *Sustainable Food Procurement Initiative* see www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/index.htm