

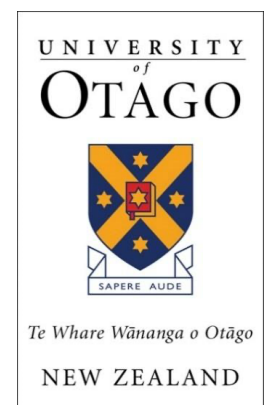
# How Colleges Face a Sustainable Future

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Actions on climate change by  
medical colleges and dental associations  
of Australia and New Zealand

2022

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## Executive summary

Doctors and their organisations have an important role in leading on climate change.

In this survey, medical colleges and dental associations of Australia and New Zealand varied widely in their response to climate change: from avoidance to centralising sustainability into college governance and activities.

Some colleges are recognising the immediate need to adapt medical systems to the changing climate.

Corporate responsibility, through measurement and reduction of emissions from college activities, is an important signal to college members that we all must act.

In many colleges there is potential for improvement in engagement with members and training on sustainability. Doctors and dentists value practical tools for measuring and reducing emissions from clinical practice.

These resources must be supported by advocacy to health system leaders and industry to more powerfully facilitate decarbonisation and adaptation of healthcare and society.

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## Aims

To **share** college-led sustainability initiatives occurring in Australasia, and to **provide guidance** for colleges on improving sustainability in their organisations and clinical specialties.

## Climate change affects health, how should doctors act?

Climate change is a major threat to public health and to the health sector.<sup>1</sup> The effects of climate change are already observable in Australasia, with record temperatures, extreme weather events, wild fires, and salt water inundation affecting sanitation. This already has consequences for the health sector in mental health, respiratory medicine, for elderly and vulnerable members of society, and is resulting in system failures in health services.<sup>2</sup> Every medical specialty will be increasingly impacted into the future.

Doctors have a large stake in preventing this deterioration in population health, and leaders have called for emergency action from doctors to limit climate change.<sup>3</sup> Doctors are uniquely placed to contribute to this, through their knowledge and skills and from being respected professional voices in their communities.<sup>4,5</sup>

Doctors have multiple potential roles in climate change. This includes as collaborators with other professions as climate change is a multidisciplinary issue, as leaders in reducing health sector emissions (which contributes 4% to 7% of greenhouse gas emissions in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>6,7</sup>); as educators to ourselves, our patients and the wider public; as advocates for local and national emission reduction policy and climate justice and, finally, as researchers to support and understand what are the most effective mitigation and adaptation actions.<sup>5,8</sup>

## The role of medical colleges

Medical and dental organisations such as colleges are the peak bodies for their professions. As such they have roles as leaders, educators and advocates. Thus far, the voice of doctors on sustainability has been from pan-medical organisations such as the Australian Medical Association, New Zealand Medical Association, Doctors for the Environment Australia and Ora Taiao. The Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges (Australia) and Council of Medical Colleges (New Zealand) have not formed a consensus statement on their role in this space.

In 2014 the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare in UK produced the *Facing the Future* report, a collation of the actions and plans of British colleges in the area of sustainability, with several recommendations.<sup>9</sup> Here we aimed to replicate this work in order to help Australasian colleges learn from each other and to formulate recommendations for responsible action on climate and sustainability.

## College participation

We approached 21 Australian and New Zealand medical colleges and dental associations to summarise their activities related to sustainability and climate change. Five did not respond, and four declined to participate (see supplementary information).

### Participants

ANZCA	Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
RANZCO	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
ACD	Australasian College of Dermatologists
RANZCP	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
RACGP	Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
RACS	Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
CICM	College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand
RANZCOG	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
RNZCGP	Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners
NZCPHM	New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine
NZDA	New Zealand Dental Association
ADA	Australian Dental Association

## Corporate sustainability: action within college offices

	ANZCA (Anaesthetists)	RANZO (Ophthalmologists)	ACD (Dermatologists)	RANZCP (Psychiatrists)	RACGP (General practice)	FACS (Surgeons)	CICM (Intensive Care)	RANZCOG (Gynaecologists)	RNZCGP (General practice)	NZCPHM (Public health)	NZDA (Dentists)	ADA (Dentists)
Measured carbon footprint of corporate activities					●			●	●			
Set emissions reduction target			●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Divested from polluting industry	●	●	●	●	●		●		●			
Sustainable building practices	●	●	●		●		●	●	●			●

● While not measuring emissions, these organisations are attempting to reduce their carbon footprint without set targets.

### The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists:

- Produced a statement in 2019 recognising the need to address climate change.
- Endorsed joint statements on climate, joined Ora Taiao, and supported their call for action on climate change and health.
- Have moved meetings, examinations and educational resources online.
- Aim to become a carbon neutral organisation in 2022 through measuring and offsetting corporate emissions from college activities.
- Established an internal Environmental Committee.
- Held a virtual scientific congress in 2021 with sustainability theme, including the plenary presentation “Caring for our Planet”.
- Developed sustainability policies in priority areas including research, carbon footprint reduction, and education.

The College of Intensive Care Medicine is committed to reducing their carbon footprint and transitioning to an environmental and sustainable governance investment portfolio. They also provide guidelines on climate change action and an ICU sustainability toolkit to improve their members’ ability to improve their own sustainable practices.

## Taking a policy position on sustainability

	ANZCA (Anaesthetists)	RANZCO (Ophthalmologists)	ACD (Dermatologists)	RANZCP (Psychiatrists)	RACGP (General practice)	RACS (Surgeons)	CICM (Intensive Care)	RANZCOG (Gynaecologists)	RNZCGP (General practice)	NZCPHM (Public health)	NZDA (Dentists)	ADA (Dentists)
Sustainability committee	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●
Published statement or policy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sustainable practice guidelines	●	●			●		●		●	●	●	●

● in development

### The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists:

- Divested from fossil fuel investments from 2021.
- Committed to sustainable waste management and reducing energy and water use in their offices, including composting and garden redesign.
- Established an Environmental Sustainability Network, providing engagement with members and collaboration across disciplines.
- Produced statements on sustainability and climate change, calling for action.
- Developed the Environmental Sustainability Audit Tool for departments and members to develop and maintain more sustainable practices.
- Established a grant for research into environmental sustainability.
- Produced online resources to reduce education-related travel, including a library guide on environmental sustainability.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists promotes sustainability to members, with college publications on sustainability, a booth at congress on Choosing Wisely and Sustainability, and preferred practice guidelines for reducing waste in cataract surgery. The practice guidelines importantly are evidence-based to integrate sustainability with safe and high quality clinical practice, and ongoing updates and revisions on other areas are under development.

## Education and engagement with trainees and fellows

	ANZCA (Anaesthetists)	RANZCO (Ophthalmologists)	ACD (Dermatologists)	RANZCP (Psychiatrists)	RACGP (General practice)	RACS (Surgeons)	CICM (Intensive Care)	RANZCOG (Gynaecologists)	RNZCGP (General practice)	NZCPHM (Public health)	NZDA (Dentists)	ADA (Dentists)
Sustainability topic at congress	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Online education to reduce travel	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sustainability in trainee curriculum	●	●	●		●				●		NA	NA
Sustainability education for fellows	●				●				●		●	●
Resources to measure or improve sustainability	●	●			●		●		●			
Recognise and promoting sustainable practice	●		●		●				●			●
Investing in research into sustainable practice	●	●										
Considering effects on the wellbeing of fellows					●				●			

● in development; NA not applicable

The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners has produced “Greening General Practice; A toolkit for sustainable practice”. This toolkit provides detailed information including energy assessments and office set-up, consideration of equipment and supplies, procurement, clinician activities and waste management. This resource offers concrete actions to improve general practice sustainability from a clinical and business standpoint.

The Australasian College of Dermatology’s Environmental Sustainability Group is hosting a Climate and Skin Summit in May 2022. International and local experts will speak on climate change’s impact on skin and the implications for the future of dermatology practice. The Summit will provide an opportunity for a College-wide discussion on sustainable practice.

The Australian Dental Association produced a policy statement including guidelines for sustainable dental practices. They have also established a communication platform for members to share ideas, experiences and tips on sustainability and changing practice.

## Reaching out: external advocacy on sustainability

	ANZCA (Anaesthetists)	RANZCO (Ophthalmologists)	ACD (Dermatologists)	RANZCP (Psychiatrists)	RACGP (General practice)	RACS (Surgeons)	CICM (Intensive Care)	RANZCOG (Gynaecologists)	RNZCGP (General practice)	NZCPHM (Public health)	NZDA (Dentists)	ADA (Dentists)
Engagement with community, indigenous groups, or external organisations on sustainability	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Participation in the multi-college Climate Change and Health Research Project	●	●		●	●	●	●	●				
Promoting sustainability in publications	●	●	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Advocacy on sustainability with politicians and regulators	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●

● Organisational members of Ora Taiao

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners has a strong Climate and Environmental Medicine Specific Interest Group which supports the college executive in recognising sustainability across the organisation. Actions include:

- Committed to net zero emissions from their organisation by 2040.
- Modified the role of their chief operating officer to include sustainability officer.
- Produced educational resources for members at conferences and online.
- Recognised impacts of climate change on members wellbeing and integrated the impacts of climate into their membership wellbeing program.
- Established a connection platform to recognise the sustainability actions of members and staff, and to share tips and ideas.

Ten colleges participated in the multi-college Climate Change and Health Research Project in 2021. The landmark report “Climate change and Australia’s health systems: A review of literature, policy and practice” outlines the urgency of action for both decarbonisation and adaptation to climate change in the health sector. The project was also a step forward in intercollege collaboration, and developed into an advocacy campaign called Health Climate Future, promoted by ten colleges.

## Summary

Participant organisations represented the majority of Australasian doctors and dentists. For these colleges and associations, engaging in meaningful actions around sustainability and climate change is important. The participants fell along a continuum, with some acting across many areas, and others focused on a smaller range of actions. The area that appeared to have the most scope for improvement was in education and engagement with trainees and fellows. Sustainability education is also lacking in other health professional training, including medical schools.<sup>10</sup> Engagement and education may also build support within the profession for the other college actions on sustainability.

It is important to recognise that some colleges and associations did not think sustainability was relevant to them, one stating that climate change was a social issue, and not an issue for their organisation to have a position on.

We conclude this report with a non-exhaustive list of recommended actions for colleges and associations. We encourage all Colleges and associations and their members to use the information in this report to allow them to focus on areas of improvement, action and collaboration in promoting sustainability in their professions and in society more widely.

## Recommended actions

### 1. Corporate sustainability demonstrates leadership

#### 1.1 Embedding sustainability in college governance

Appointing sustainability representatives at a board level, allocating agenda space, and committing to a sustainable development plan.

#### 1.2 Corporate footprints

Recognising and quantifying the emissions from college activities and demonstrating a pathway to net zero across business, buildings and college events. Reporting corporate emissions and reductions in public financial disclosures.

#### 1.3 Responsible investment

Declaring an ethical and sustainable investment policy so that colleges are not profiting from polluting industries.

#### 1.4 Sustainable events

Hybrid meetings are standard in 2022, and an option to attend meetings virtually in order to reduce travel must continue to be offered. Meetings should be paperless and eliminate consumption of single use items such as cups.



## 2. Enabling sustainable change for members

### 2.1 Promoting sustainability

Celebrating the actions of staff and members through college communications and online networks. This includes case studies, promotion of innovations and bold actions.

### 2.2 Resources and tools

Collecting and presenting research about sustainable practice and identifying barriers to adopting this practice. Facilitating methods to measure emissions from practice, and techniques to reduce those footprints. This should be an ongoing process along with curriculum development, to measure and discuss the climate implications for future health innovations, and factor these into cost effectiveness considerations.

### 2.3 Facilitating learning on sustainability

Sustainability and sustainable practice should be a curriculum item for trainees. Accreditation of hospitals as training facilities is one mechanism by which colleges can signal the importance of sustainable practice.

It should also be a topic for continuing professional development of fellows. Auditing sustainability and reviewing methods to improve it should be supported and encouraged activities.

### 2.4 Research

Committing to the funding of research in this area, such as evaluating the effectiveness of college sustainability actions, understanding the learning and support needs of members.

## 3. Speaking out for climate and health

### 3.1 Advocacy to politicians

Colleges, as voices for their profession, should advocate for bold action at high level to decarbonise the health sector and to pursue bold emissions reductions targets across society. Adaptation to climate change will also require investment in service innovation.

The multi-college Healthy Climate Future advocacy project in 2022 describes this as calls for a Climate Friendly and Climate Ready health system.

### 3.2 Advocacy to regional and health leaders

At regional and local levels, colleges can support their members in leading service changes and demanding sustainability become a performance indicator for healthcare delivery.

Colleges can also advocate for wider system changes such as public transport and energy infrastructure upgrades that will reduce emissions associated with healthcare.

### 3.3 Advocacy to industry

Many innovations in decarbonised healthcare will require industry participation, and colleges can act as a professional voice to signal the importance of these changes.

## Supplementary information

### Funding and conflicts of interest

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### Acknowledgements

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### Methods

This project was ethically approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (ref D21/348). We identified 19 medical colleges (members of either the Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges or the Council of Medical Colleges) and two national dental associations, and approached each through public contact details. Each organisation was sent an information sheet and consent form, and a document outlining the publicly available information on their sustainability activities (including the Australian Medical Association and Doctors for the Environment Australia webinar in September 2021). Consenting participating organisations were interviewed to confirm the public information and elicit any new or unpublicised activities. One college (RACS) consented to the use of publicly available information without providing a further interview. We have re-checked the accuracy of this information and made every effort to avoid errors, but we acknowledge there may be inaccuracies as colleges are large organisations and their activities are always changing.

### Colleges who did not participate

ACEM	Australasian College of Emergency Medicine
ACRRM	Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
ACSEP	Australian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians
NZAMM	New Zealand Association of Musculoskeletal Medicine
RACMA	Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
RACP	Royal Australasian College of Physicians
RANZCR	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
RCPA	Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
RNZCUC	Royal New Zealand College of Urgent Care

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