



WA Health Climate Action Plan 2023

Climate change and healthcare systems

The World Health Organization has described climate change as the greatest threat to public health in the 21st century. Health systems are recognised as significant contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, due in part to the nature of their activities. Many healthcare facilities operate continuously, and all need to comply with high standards of hygiene, safety and quality to protect patients.

WA Health carbon footprint

All healthcare activities carry an environmental and carbon cost, from the energy and water consumed in our hospitals and buildings, to the vehicles used to transport patients, staff and visitors, and the products purchased to deliver patient care.

To reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, we must first understand our total emissions and where these come from. This is known as a carbon footprint.

The carbon footprint for WA Health was calculated using methodology which connects an environmental impact (in this case, GHG emissions) to the monetary transactions within a given economic system for a given year.

Figure 1 illustrates the breakdown of WA Health's total carbon footprint.

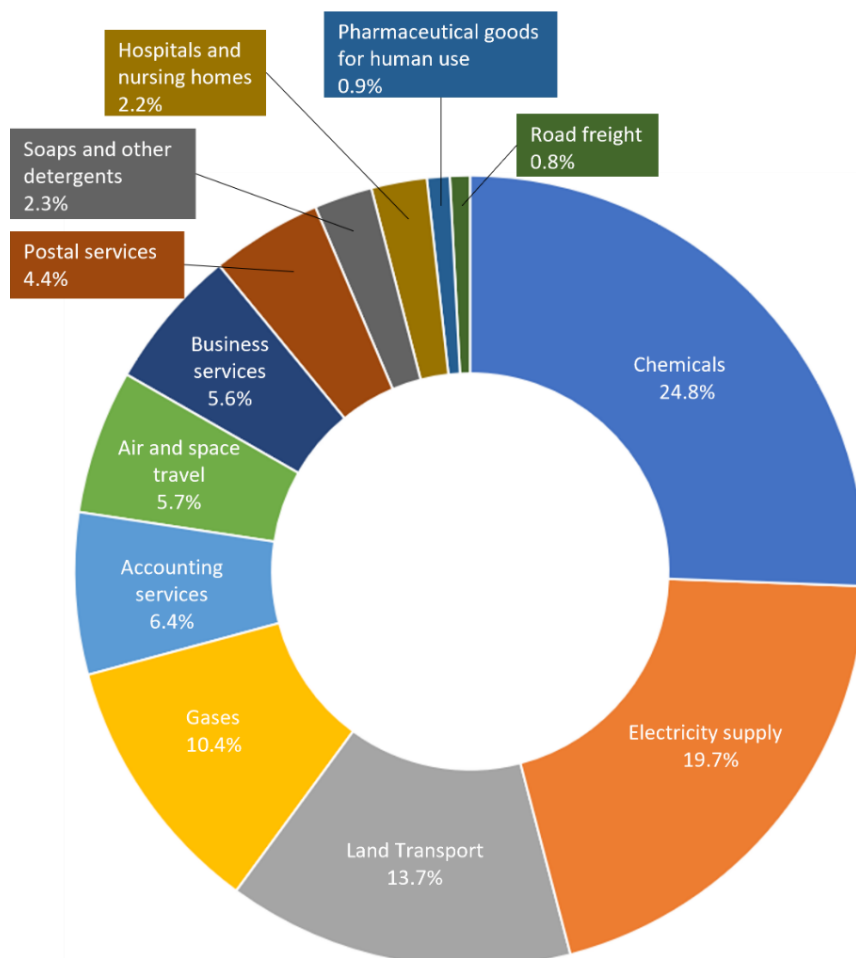


Figure 1: Top 12 economic sectors contributing to WA Health's greenhouse gas emissions

The sources of emissions reflect common patterns seen across other health systems, but with some additional findings that reflect the unique operating environment for delivering health services in WA. In particular:

- Transport services, including the movement of patients via the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme and road freight, contributed 20.2 per cent of total emissions.
- Emissions from WA Health's energy use, including the heating and cooling of healthcare facilities, contributed 19.7 per cent of total emissions.
- The manufacture and delivery of products and services used within the health system represented almost half (46%) of WA Health's emissions.

Overall, the total carbon footprint for WA Health in 2020 was 6,578 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents, which is approximately 8 per cent of the state's total emissions.

What we are doing

The Sustainable Development Unit was established to lead and coordinate a systemwide response to climate action and sustainability and is supported by a network of Sustainability Leads across WA Health.

The results of this carbon footprint assessment will guide decision-making and inform a clear path to decarbonise our health system.

A Strategy is being developed which will set out how WA Health will reduce emissions, operate more sustainably, and implement adaptation measures to protect the community from the health risks associated with climate change.

Several initiatives are already underway to limit our environmental impact and build staff capacity, expertise and skills to support the transition to a climate resilient and low carbon health system. Examples include:

- Roll-out of electric vehicle charging stations and electric vehicle fleets across health care sites.
- Energy efficiency programs such as LED lighting replacement and on-site renewable energy.
- Product replacement programs to reduce single-use plastic items.
- Exploration of lower carbon medicines with a focus on medical gases.
- Expansion of waste streams to divert waste from landfill and increase reuse and recycling of materials.
- Establishment of education programs and green champion networks to build staff knowledge, skills and capacity.
- Strengthening adaptation strategies to respond to the health impacts and risks of climate change, including development of a Health Sector Adaptation Plan, scheduled for completion in 2024.
- Development of communication strategies to strengthen public awareness of links between climate change and health, with a focus on vulnerable groups.

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