



## CHILDREN'S HOSPITALS GREEN PROMISE

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## INTRODUCTION

Children’s hospitals across the planet play a fundamental and unique role in protecting and advancing the health and well-being of children and adolescents. We provide a range of healthcare services from prevention to critical care, we train a highly skilled pediatric workforce, we drive research and innovation to ensure that the best possible medical outcomes are constantly improving, and we collaborate with a variety of partners to contribute to health initiatives with a broad and long-term impact.

We have long promised to respect, promote, and defend the rights of children and young people and provide them with the highest quality healthcare. We recognize the impact of a deteriorating environment on the children of today and tomorrow throughout their life course, and the long-term implications not only for the health of individuals but also for the social and economic health of our communities, and we acknowledge the scientific evidence that demonstrates the pressing need for concrete action to ensure that current and future generations can have a healthier and more sustainable future.

We therefore unite our collective voice with that of our primary stakeholders – the children and young people we serve – in calling for ambitious change, and we promise – to children and their families, to each other, to our communities and to the environment itself – to be agents of that change, integrating this priority within our overarching mission to provide the highest quality healthcare so children can thrive and reach their full potential.

This document – our Promise – builds upon the efforts already underway at individual children’s hospitals with the collective ambition to support the global effort to tackle environmental threats to children’s health. The initiatives described are ambitious but achievable, and are deliberately broad in order to allow each participating hospital to implement the most appropriate strategy for their unique opportunities and needs.

We gratefully acknowledge the substantial work that has been done to date while also recognizing that more can and must be done. This Promise does not aim to reinvent the wheel, but to create a critical mass of shared effort toward priorities that reflect those established by the international community but are tailored toward the unique opportunities and needs of children’s hospitals.

This document is intended as a Promise in the most rigorous sense of the term, and while not legally binding, is representative of our collective commitment to ensuring the health and wellness of current and future generations.

## I. We promise to act...

We recognize the pressing need for concrete and ambitious action to ensure that the children and adolescents of today and tomorrow can grow up in a healthy environment, and therefore promise to act:

### ...TO MAKE **SUSTAINABILITY** AN INTEGRAL PART OF HOW WE CARE FOR CHILDREN

We recognize that the healthcare sector itself is an unintentional contributor to trends that undermine the health of children and young people. Children's hospitals can play a leadership role in improving the environmental sustainability of the healthcare sector as a whole while also by reducing their own environmental footprint.

**We therefore commit to implementing science-based targets and quantifiable actions, as well as mechanisms to gauge our progress, which may include specific initiatives such as:**

1. Reducing fossil fuel energy use and fostering energy efficiency as well as alternative, renewable energy use, and implementing a series of conservation, recycling and treatment measures to reduce hospital water consumption and wastewater pollution.
2. Reducing negative environmental, social and health impacts through healthcare procurement and the development of transportation and service delivery strategies that reduce hospitals' climate footprint and their contribution to local pollution.
3. Improving the health and safety of patients, staff, communities and the environment by using safer and more sustainably sourced foods, chemicals, materials, products and processes, going beyond the requirements of environmental compliance.
4. Reducing the volume and toxicity of waste produced while implementing the most environmentally sound waste management and disposal options, and reducing the presence of pharmaceuticals in the environment.

### ...TO BOLSTER OUR **CAPACITY** TO CARE FOR CHILDREN IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

We recognize that the healthcare sector must continually evolve in order to improve its ability to tackle the challenges facing children's health, including those related to a changing environment. Children's hospitals can contribute to understanding the negative impacts of our changing environment and designing new strategies to face them.

**We commit to promoting and participating in specific programs for research and training, which may include specific initiatives such as:**

1. Promoting, advocating for, and participating in basic and clinical science, research and innovation that will advance knowledge regarding the environment's impact on child health and drive the discovery of improved therapeutic approaches.
2. Contributing to public health research and policies to assess and mitigate the long-term health, social and economic impacts associated with environmental change, such as a decrease in health over the life course and the costs associated with an increase in chronic health problems.
3. Preparing the pediatric work force to respond to emerging trends such as changing non-communicable disease patterns, environmental disaster-related events and the spread of communicable diseases related to environmental changes.
4. Ensuring that hospitals have trained sustainability teams and staff, as well as the involvement of organizational leadership, structures, and processes, such as board-level champions, an organizational sustainability plan, systems to facilitate clinical engagement, educational initiatives, and mechanisms to involve patients and families.
5. Raising awareness amongst health professionals about the links between environment and health so that they can become powerful advocates both within and outside the hospital.

### ...TO MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT AN ACTIVE PART OF THE **TEAM** CARING FOR CHILDREN

We recognize the symbiotic relationship between the environment and all humans and the positive impact that the environment can have on the physical and mental health of children, families, our communities and our staff. Children's hospitals can play an important role in promoting trends toward healthier indoor spaces and more sustainable behaviors both within and outside hospital complexes.

#### **We commit to using our hospital spaces to improve our relationship with the natural environment, which may include specific initiatives such as:**

1. Making hospitals healthier places to work and visit, by incorporating green building principles and practices into design and construction of health facilities.
2. Fostering healthy eating habits in patients, families and staff, and supporting access to locally and sustainability sourced food in the community.
3. Taking advantage of the unique communication opportunities presented by children's hospitals to give children an opportunity to learn about Nature and educate patients and families about environmentally sustainable practices.

## II. WE PROMISE TO COLLABORATE

We recognize that no organization can solve the difficult challenges facing our planet on its own, and that building long-term relationships and partnerships is fundamental to achieving our goal of a healthy planet for healthy children. Children's hospitals can strengthen their reciprocal commitment to one another and their alliance with the children and adolescents they serve to fight for a better future.

**We commit to working together on concrete joint initiatives that benefit from the collaboration of children's hospitals around the world as well as other stakeholders engaged in promoting children's health and protecting the environment, which may include specific initiatives such as:**

1. Sharing ideas, problems, results and best practices with each other in an open and proactive way, and setting concrete and quantifiable goals to work toward.
2. Calling upon our industrial partners and suppliers, including the pharmaceutical industry, to reduce the environmental impact of the entire supply chain.
3. Cooperating and coordinating activities with associated research centers, scientific societies, patient associations and governmental organizations to drive progress at all levels.
4. Working together to make joint commitments, such as net zero emissions, and working together to achieve them.
5. Cultivating the involvement of children and adolescents by creating opportunities for them to contribute and ensuring accountability toward them.

## III. WE PROMISE TO AMPLIFY

We recognize that a healthy and sustainable future for the children of today and tomorrow will only be possible through the aggressive and combined efforts of all citizens and organizations around the world and across disciplines and sectors. Children's hospitals can use their privileged position as guardians of the health and wellness of children to lead by example and inspire others to do the same.

**We commit to sharing the results of our work and extending it to other actors in the healthcare sector and beyond, which may include initiatives such as:**

1. Advocating for our patients and supporting them to ensure that they are well-represented and that their voices are heard.

2. Realizing widespread hospital worker and community education and engagement, improving public understanding, and calling for ambitious public policies that promote physical and environmental health.
3. Openly sharing with actors across all sectors and disciplines.
4. Promoting the generation and adoption of innovative solutions by all actors.

This statement was drafted in collaboration with Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe. ECHO would like to thank HCWH for their contributions and for their commitment to improving child health.

### About ECHO

The European Children's Hospitals Organisation (ECHO) advocates for children's health and their access to the best quality care through the collaborative work of children's hospitals. Find out more at <https://www.echohospitals.org>



### About HCWH

Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe is the European arm of a global not for profit NGO whose mission is to transform healthcare worldwide so that it reduces its environmental footprint, becomes a community anchor for sustainability and a leader in the global movement for environmental health and justice. HCWH's vision is that healthcare mobilises its ethical, economical, and political influence to create an ecologically sustainable, equitable, and healthy world. Find out more at <https://noharm-europe.org/>

