



Echuca Regional Health



Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2027

Acknowledgement of Country

Echuca Regional Health acknowledges the Yorta Yorta people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters that the health service occupies. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Introduction

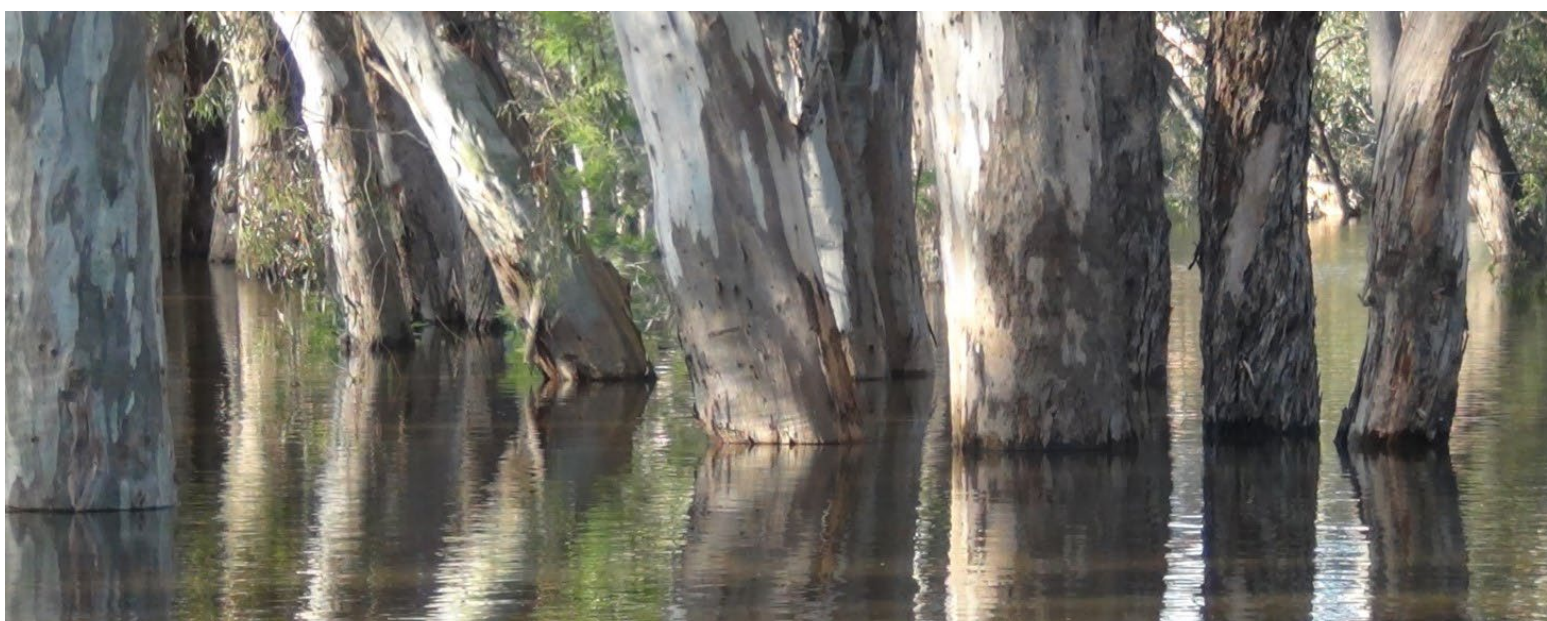
Climate Change is recognised as the biggest challenge our healthcare systems face, with the impacts directly affecting communities, but also the ability of health systems to respond to extreme weather events. People across our region have experienced first-hand how climate change can devastate communities through unprecedented rain events and floods but also droughts, bushfires and heatwaves. Current projections show that temperatures will keep rising, leading to weather events that will become more severe, more frequent and less predictable. Governments at all levels have set emissions reduction targets, aiming to lessen the impacts of climate change and the inevitable devastation that will result, but we all need to act with haste.

Tackling climate change is underpinned by a need to understand our carbon footprint better, as individuals and communities. Healthcare is recognised as a significant contributor to climate change, contributing up to 7% of the greenhouse gas emissions comprising Australia's total carbon footprint.

The delivery of healthcare contributes to changes in the global climate through practices such as:

- Unnecessary or even harmful tests, procedures or interventions
- Unnecessary use of resources
- Poor waste management
- Uncontrolled procurement of products
- Unnecessary travel
- Unmanaged energy or water use
- Inadequate, poorly implemented and integrated or delivered public health and preventative health
- Poor use and management of medicines, devices and materials
- Ineffective design and management of facilities.

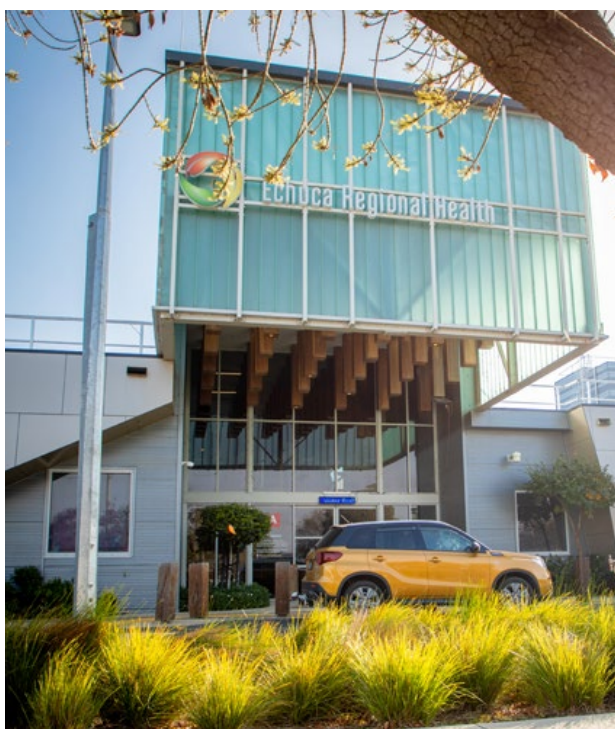
There is an urgent need to reduce health service emissions and waste and prepare our teams, functions and infrastructure to deliver effective and safe health care in a sustainability framework.



About Echuca Regional Health

Echuca Regional Health (ERH) provides services on Yorta Yorta Country for people who live, work and play in Northern Victoria and Southern New South Wales. ERH is located within the regional town of Echuca where the Murray (Dungala), Campaspe (Yakoa) and Goulburn (Gaiyila) Rivers meet. Our community, which is vibrant and growing, includes approximately 52,000 people living on both sides of the state border. Since 1882 ERH has been a provider of health and social services, as well as health education and training. Services are provided across the lifespan and include community services, population health, acute, sub-acute and residential aged care.

To plan for the future ERH recently completed a Clinical Services Plan. Our Clinical Services Plan identified community attributes including population growth, ageing population, reduction in services at smaller surrounding health services, seasonal population fluctuations and the levels of socio-economic disadvantage experienced by our community. Key challenges for ERH therefore include safely responding to service demand, increasing our level of self-sufficiency to ensure care is provided close to home, and providing equity and access to health care for all.



Our campus is an active hub for over 1000 staff who lead in health service provision as well as education and training. Parts of the campus are state of the art including a new Cancer and Wellness Centre and relatively new acute hospital however our infrastructure is under pressure as a result of significant increases in service demand and ageing building stock and technologies. Now, more than ever we need strong plans for the future.

The development of our strategic plan 2024 – 2027 was designed following deep and broad consultation with our community. We heard from our community that they value services delivered in a kind and friendly way, that cross border care should be seamless and that we should continue to yarn with our community as we plan for the future. The community also highlighted that we should support our workforce as we grow into a bigger health service and that our “workforce is also our community”. Our community are keen to embrace virtual technologies, but don’t want anyone to be left behind as our models of care evolve. They want ERH to be strong and caring leaders.

To ensure that our health service safely meets the needs of the community, in our Strategic Plan we have committed to the strategic pillars of Our People, Our Service, Our Community and Our Future. We will deliver our strategy in alignment with our values of Collaboration, Accountability, Respect and Excellence. ERH recognises that environmental sustainability is relevant to all strategic pillars and values. Thus, it is vital that sustainable practices are integrated within all facility practices/functions for us to successfully meet our goals and provide the highest quality service. We will report back to the community every year on our progress and whilst we deliver on this strategy, we will remain agile and responsive to changes in the strategic environment to benefit our community.

Why ERH needs to act

The impacts of climate change are being felt in our community today. Heat stress, fires, storms and floods, along with changes to disease patterns caused by our changing environment are real issues for our community, staff and health services.

Sustainable development, sustainable practices and net zero targets are key strategies that aim to mitigate the impact of climate change on our environment. We have a responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect global ecosystems to support health and wellbeing, now and in the future. Because so many decisions that impact the environment are not felt immediately, a key element of environmental sustainability and planetary health lies in their forward-looking nature. Leading our community is integral to an effective environmental sustainability response.

Our vision is to strive to minimise our environmental footprint, and maximise our positive impact for patients, residents, their families and our community. As noted in our strategic plan we are committed to being a sustainable health service, targeting net zero via implementation of adaptation initiatives to support health and wellbeing.

Climate change is acknowledged as a crucial determinant of public health. A growing evidence base tells us that vulnerable individuals and populations are more at risk and susceptible to harm. Climate change amplifies inequitable access to healthcare and the quality of care for the most vulnerable communities. While no one is immune to the health implications of climate change, communities who are socioeconomically and geographically disadvantaged will disproportionately feel the health impacts due to being less resilient to climate change. We know that children, older people and individuals living with medical conditions are more at risk and that hotter weather and natural disasters leads to an increase in emergency presentations with mental health issues.



Our sustainability strategy

The Environmental Sustainability Strategy has been developed around assessments of environmental and climate change risk, key local, state and national policy directions, feedback from staff through surveys and other collaborative processes, improved technologies and best practice evidence on health care and climate change.

In alignment with the Victorian Department of Health's strategic directions, ERH's environmental sustainability strategy revolves around three key priorities:

- Enhancing environmental performance
- Adapting to a changing climate
- Providing leadership and engagement

Under these three priority areas, we will report on seven main delivery streams, while maintaining the flexibility to support staff-led initiatives. Through the implementation of this environmental sustainability strategy, we aim to not only improve our own environmental record but also to inspire others within the healthcare industry to prioritise sustainability.

By setting an example, we can contribute to a healthier and more sustainable future for our patients, staff and the wider community.

How we will reach our goals

ERH is committed to implementing meaningful environmental sustainability measures while:

- Prioritising safe patient care;
- Delivering results in alignment with our care values;
- Being financially responsible to maximise value for the community.



ERH's environmental sustainability priority streams

Enhancing environmental performance

- 1 Clinical Care – sustainable clinical care that identifies, and reduces clinical impact
- 2 Procurement – sourcing cleaner and more socially responsible products, services and supply chains
- 3 Waste – introduce and maintain a sustainable waste management system

Adapting to a changing climate

- 4 Infrastructure – environmentally sustainable building design, construction and operations
- 5 Transport – reduce vehicle emissions

Providing leadership and engagement

- 6 Ensure climate action is integrated into the leadership, governance and culture of care within and across ERH
- 7 Empower and educate staff to be involved through in-services and other information dissemination methods



Our Action Plan

Clinical Care

The provision of Clinical Care is estimated to account for most of Health Industry's total emissions. How health care is delivered impacts the products and services used during care (consumables, medical devices, pharmaceuticals), the waste generated, the resources consumed by the facilities and the transport of patients, equipment, consumables and staff.

Low-value care is a significant source of negative environmental impact, as is the preventable escalation of care. Low-value healthcare provides little value or may even harm consumers and is estimated to be as much as 30% of healthcare. To reduce this impact, health services must prioritise efficient, effective evidence-based care-delivery at the right time and setting to prevent escalation of care or low value care. This will require changes and innovations across all services and specialties to improve our patient and environmental outcomes. This includes identifying and addressing known hotspots, such as anesthetic gases, and the volume of single use consumables.

ERH will work towards sustainable clinical care provision that identifies and reduces environmental impact.

Activity	Timeframe	Responsibility
1.1 Collaborating and supporting development of sustainable models of care that reduce clinical variation or minimise low value such as the Choosing Wisely initiative to reduce unnecessary tests, treatments and procedures; Value Based Surgery guidance to reduce incidence of surgeries that offer little to no benefit to the patient.	July 2025	Clinical Directors of Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health
1.2 Environmental Sustainability is incorporated into existing and new Clinical Service planning and implementation	July 2026	Executive
1.3 Conduct audits and literature review to identify and drive reduction of carbon hotspots in clinical care: desflurane, nitrous oxide, high carbon inhalers	July 2025	Clinicians
1.4 Identify, develop and implement existing and new environmental stewardship programs for clinical services e.g. The Green Theatre checklist and GreenED programs	July 2025	Department Managers

Procurement

Embedding sustainability in procurement practice is imperative to developing a sustainable organisation. ERH purchases many goods and services including pharmaceuticals, food, energy, chemicals and electronics. The way we choose what to purchase and the volume of our purchases are catalysts to change our sustainability practices and who we purchase from. ERH will consider sustainability practices in all our decisions to procure goods and services, including environmental impact, social benefits and economic benefits.

ERH will review our practices to avoid unnecessary consumption and to integrate use and reuse to extend the life of products.

Activity		Timeframe	Responsibility
2.1	All purchasing decisions to consider local procurement, whole lifecycle costs and environmental impact	July 2025	Procurement Manager
2.2	Ensure all Procurement Policies, Procedures and processes for goods and services supports sustainability goals	December 2025	Procurement Manager
2.3	Eliminate the use of single-use plastics	July 2026	Corporate Services Manager



Waste

ERH produces a significant amount of waste per year, contributing to land, air and water pollution. The disposal of waste into landfill and incinerators releases large amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Disposal of hospital clinical waste is particularly costly at about 10 times the cost of general waste, it also requires extensive and energy intensive treatment prior to going to landfill. There are large environmental benefits to be gained from the thorough separation of hospital infectious and general waste management.

ERH will seek to minimise waste by improving resource efficiency, increase and expand recycling streams and seek out new opportunities that engage with our teams to avoid and reduce waste.

Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
3.1 Reduce paper use through electronic record keeping, paperless meetings and encourage use of portable technology like laptops. Where paper is used, ensure it is sourced from a recycled source	December 2025	Department Managers
3.2 Work with contractors to clarify clinical waste definition to reduce clinical waste and accept co-mingled plastic waste, including uncontaminated clinical products to expand on recycling streams	July 2025	Corporate Services Manager
3.3 Identify new avenues for increasing segregation of waste and recycling for example, plastics in operating theatres and medication blister packs	July 2025	Corporate Services Manager
3.4 Provide a balanced risk assessment of costs associated with waste to establish a position on single use versus re-use/sterilisation policies, with input from Infection Prevention and Control e.g. theatre gowns and other PPE equipment	July 2025	Director of Nursing, Surgical Services

Infrastructure

Sustainability can be incorporated into the design and construction of capital works projects to minimise carbon emissions, reduce energy consumption, and streamline waste management and processes. Design features, including building orientation and natural ventilation, can maximise daylight and shade, and reduce a building's energy requirements. Landscape features such as green roofs and trees, and native vegetation planted on site can mitigate the heat-island effect, reducing the cooling requirements of buildings. Not only are there environmental and economic advantages associated with green building principles, there is a growing body of evidence supporting sustainable hospitals as healing environments that support staff retention, job satisfaction and improve patient outcomes.

ERH will ensure all new construction and works projects consider leading environmental sustainability systems and practices from conception to operation.

Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
4.1 Ensure all new constructions comply with sustainability codes, policies and standards including NABERS and level 4 Green Star Rating	December 2025	Engineering Manager
4.2 Ensure sustainable development forms a key part of Asset Management planning	December 2025	Engineering Manager



Transport

With over 1,000 staff, ERH is responsible for providing health and well-being to about 50,000 people in our community. Transport contributes significantly to health care's carbon footprint, comprising of emissions caused directly and indirectly by staff, patients and consumers travelling to and from health care, between facilities and corporate travel.

There is scope for improvement in our travel footprint through more efficient vehicles and reducing unnecessary travel, particularly given the geographic area covered by ERH.

ERH will support an environment that enables active and sustainable transport choices, encourages staff to walk or ride to work and will introduce hybrid and electric fleet vehicles.

Strategy	Timeframe	Responsibility
5.1 Increase District electric vehicle fleet and plug-in hybrid fleet	December 2025	Corporate Services Manager
5.2 Increase videoconferencing and teleconferencing availability to staff	July 2025	ICT Manager
5.3 Implement telemedicine clinics to reduce travel for patients and families	December 2025	Executive Director Community Services
5.4 Increase and improve bicycle infrastructure to encourage staff to ride to work, including secure priority parking and bike access, and shower facilities	July 2025	Engineering Manager
5.5 Collaborate with local and state government to encourage the development of town infrastructure that supports low emission transport e.g. bike paths, public transport	December 2025	CEO
5.6 Undertake a site power audit to determine capacity to install a charging site for staff access	December 2024	Engineering Manager

Leadership and engagement

Leadership and engagement will be an essential driver of ERH Environmental Sustainability Strategy, and Environmental Sustainability Workgroup to maintain oversight of its implementation. We will actively celebrate and share change to gain the confidence of our teams and encourage the mobilization of localised actions that contribute towards our environmental sustainability. At ERH we place value on the unique role of Aboriginal people as environmental stewards and recognize the connection of Aboriginal people towards country and responsibility in caring for country over thousands of years.

Strategy	Timeframe	Responsibility
6.1 Aboriginal Leadership is incorporated into all levels of Environmental Sustainability decision making	December 2024	Executive Director Community Services
6.2 Environmental Sustainability is a key consideration in the ERH strategic plan	July 2025	CEO
6.3 Executives to include Environmental Sustainability initiatives as a goal in their divisional operational plans	July 2025	CEO
6.4 Ensure coordination between Environmental Sustainability activities and relevant Aboriginal specific programs, procedures, health initiatives or strategies	July 2025	Executive Director Community Services



Governance

The Environmental Sustainability Working Group was first formed in December 2022, by a group of passionate staff members keen to drive change within ERH. The Working Group meet on a quarterly basis and will oversee the governance relating to the actions agreed in the Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan and monitor progress towards the achievement of the agreed actions. Effective governance is crucial to addressing evolving environmental sustainability priorities and expectations.