



September 9, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable John Kerry
Special Presidential Envoy for
Climate
United States State Department
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary, U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear President Biden, Secretary Kerry, and Secretary Becerra,

As members of the [U.S. Health Care Climate Council](#), we are writing to express our support for the Administration to commit to build a low-carbon, resilient health system in the United States as part of the [COP26 Health Programme](#).

The Sixth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released this August is an alarm bell. The damage driven by burning fossil fuels is now widespread and severe, it is caused by human activities, and we are at a tipping point. To avoid the most disastrous impacts of climate change, we need a more coordinated effort across all sectors around the world.

Health care is at the frontline of climate change, bearing both the financial costs and human health burden from increased disease spread and more frequent extreme weather events. In 2020, our health care systems faced the challenges of both a global pandemic and the growing health impacts from climate change. 2020 was the [second-hottest year on record](#) for the planet and set a new record for extreme weather with [22 extreme weather and climate incidents](#) resulting in losses exceeding \$1 billion each. Wildfires engulfed the entire west coast, hurricanes ravaged the southeast, flooding and severe storms devastated the Midwest, and the whole country struggled with heat waves in the hottest summer the northern hemisphere has ever experienced.

As leaders of 19 U.S. health care systems with over 6800 hospitals and health centers in 39 states, we are seeing these impacts firsthand, challenging our ability to deliver care and harming the health and livelihoods of our patients and communities, especially the most under-resourced.

The Administration has demonstrated a clear understanding of the urgency of the moment by committing to an ambitious, science-based target to halve the country's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. We commend the Administration's whole-of-government approach, with a strong grounding in health and equity, and its Executive Orders for the Department of Health and Human Services to establish an Office of Climate Change and Health Equity, an interagency working group to decrease the impacts of climate change on disproportionately impacted populations, and an advisory council on health care system readiness.



The U.S. health care sector is responsible for [8.5% of the nation's emissions](#) and makes up [27% of health care's global emissions](#). We have an obligation and opportunity to decarbonize our health care operations and set a leadership example for countries around the world. Since over 80% of the U.S. health sector footprint is due to indirect emissions, with pharmaceuticals and chemicals contributing nearly 20% of those emissions, it is critical that the Administration also engages the health care supply chain in these efforts. **We therefore support the Administration in making a commitment to build a low-carbon, resilient health system in the United States as part of the COP26 Health Programme.**

We recognize that as the only sector with a healing mission and as guardians of community health, hospitals and health care systems must not only do our part, we must lead the way. Our health systems and hospitals have all joined the [Health Care Climate Challenge](#) and have set the most ambitious greenhouse gas reduction goals in the country to protect the 74 million patients we serve annually and our communities from the health impacts of climate change. We have found that our strong commitments to [climate-smart health care](#) have yielded significant return on investment in terms of financial savings, employee retention and satisfaction, and improvements in patient outcomes.

We also recognize that there are technical and financial challenges to decarbonization, particularly with deeper decarbonization efforts in existing facilities. It will be critical for the Administration to: 1) address regulatory requirements that make it more difficult to decarbonize; 2) provide technical assistance and funding for tribal, territorial, safety net, and rural hospitals; and 3) fund research, pilot projects, and provide incentives for emissions that are difficult to decarbonize, like thermal energy. As with all sectors, health care decarbonization is dependent on the country investing in a more stable grid, powered by clean, renewable electricity. In order to ensure we can take care of our patients when the grid fails, hospitals will also need decentralized solutions like renewable energy microgrids with storage.

We stand at the ready to share best practices and support the administration in its commitment through the COP26 Health Programme to decarbonize our health care system and ensure that our facilities and communities are climate-resilient.

Sincerely,

The U.S. Health Care Climate Council

The [U.S. Health Care Climate Council](#) is a leadership body of 19 health systems committed to protecting our patients and employees from the health impacts of climate change and becoming anchors for resilient communities. Health Care Climate Council members implement innovative climate solutions, inspire and support others to act, and use our trusted voice and purchasing power to move policy and markets to drive the transformation to climate-smart health care.