

# Putting greener healthcare into practice



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This article aims to support healthcare professionals working within general practice to implement Ten ways to implement sustainable greener healthcare in primary care respiratory practice, a publication from the Primary Care Respiratory Society (PCRS). It offers practical tips, resources and advice on steps you can take to prioritise options and break down the activities required into manageable tasks.

We are in a climate crisis, and everyone has a role to play in addressing it. The NHS contributes approximately 4-5% of UK greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> These emissions influence microclimates, and the quality of the air that people breathe in their locality can worsen respiratory symptoms. Primary care accounts for around 1% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions and 23% of the NHS carbon footprint.<sup>2</sup> Within respiratory care, there is also a clear link between clinical outcomes and environmental impact: uncontrolled asthma is associated with 22% higher greenhouse gas emissions than controlled asthma.<sup>3</sup>

All four UK nations have established carbon reduction targets. Changes in prescribing practice can contribute to these goals. For example, the use of lower- carbon inhalers, such as dry powder inhalers (DPIs), has the potential to reduce NHS carbon emissions by 4% and the carbon footprint by a factor of 18.<sup>4</sup> Relatively small changes in practice can collectively have a substantial impact and more sustainable approaches can also improve patient outcomes.

Leading change in greener healthcare presents challenges. Primary care teams are already managing competing priorities and significant time pressures, and there may be uncertainty about the impact of sustainability initiatives or concern about creating additional work. Practical leadership approaches can help address these barriers, including deciding what actions to take, prioritising effectively, identifying supportive colleagues, avoiding overwhelm, and focusing on moving ideas into action.

**It is important to build your tribe – this will be a team effort.**



There are various potential approaches to greener healthcare, and priorities will differ between practices. Some possible short-term and long-term might include:



## Short-term goals

1. Switch to ethical bank and energy providers
2. Promote sustainable travel
3. Leverage data for sustainable practice
4. Shared decisions around inhaler prescribing
5. Safe disposal schemes of medical waste, especially inhalers



## Long-term aspirations

1. Embrace social prescribing
2. Donate and recycle
3. Explore energy renewables
4. Adopt simple everyday changes
5. Encourage plant-based diets

**Figure 1. Using the MoSCoW prioritisation method to decide which projects are most important**



These are illustrative examples

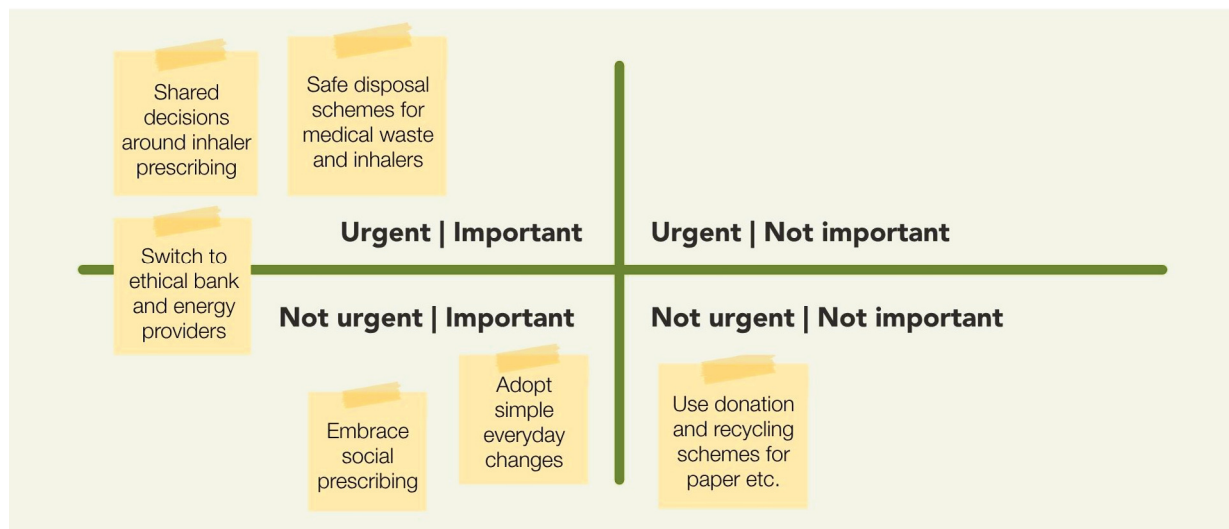
When considering next steps, it is important to reflect on what is realistic based on existing resources and funding. Some ambitions may need to be deferred. Change should be led without pressure or guilt, focusing on achievable, small steps and celebrating progress along the way.

Prioritisation tools can support decision-making. The MoSCoW method categorises actions into must-have, should-have, could-have and won't-have, helping teams to agree on what matters most (Figure 1).

Similarly, the Eisenhower matrix helps organise tasks based on urgency and importance, distinguishing between what needs immediate attention and what will have the greatest impact on outcomes (Figure 2). A good approach to structuring the matrix is to work as a team to rank each task in order of importance and then urgency.

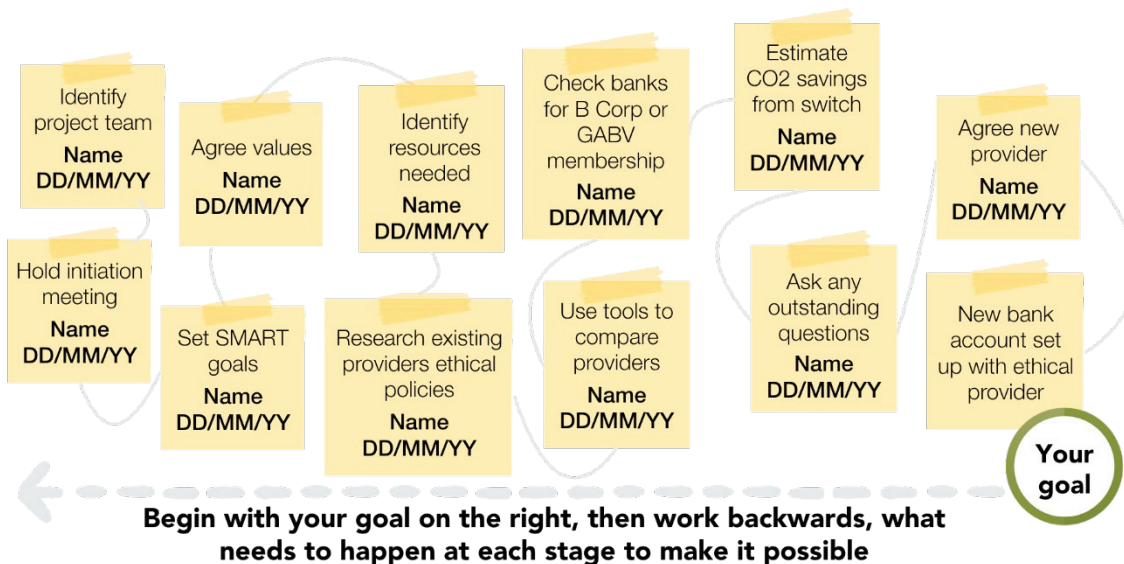
Turning ideas into action can be supported by a structured approach such as “Sticky steps”. This

**Figure 2. Using the Eisenhower matrix to rank tasks in order of urgency and importance**



These are illustrative examples

**Figure 3. Using the Sticky steps approach to illustrate how to switch to ethical bank account providers**



The same checklist approach can be applied to any of the ten actions  
**SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based**

involves imagining that you have succeeded in your project and working backwards, detailing what needs to happen at each stage to make it possible. Tasks can be organised sequentially, with clear allocation of responsibility, timelines and required resources (Figure 3). Reviewing the plan can help identify any gaps before implementation.

Actionable steps should align with SMART principles, with agreement on how success will be measured and what data will be required. At the end of the project, the team should review the outcomes and take time to celebrate success.

Greener healthcare is an important priority that can be integrated into routine practice without significant additional work. Building a supportive team and using practical tools such as MoSCoW, the Eisenhower matrix and Sticky steps can help your team select, prioritise and implement effective actions.

#### References

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2. Tennison I, Roschnik S, Ashby B, et al. Health care's response to climate change: a carbon footprint assessment of the NHS in England. *Lancet Planet Health* 2021; 5: e84–e92. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-51969\(20\)30271-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-51969(20)30271-0)
3. Orlovic M, Tzelis D, Guerra I, et al. Environmental, healthcare and societal impacts of asthma: a UK model-based assessment. *ERJ Open Res* 2024;10(4):00577-02023. <https://doi.org/10.1183/23120541.00577-2023>
4. UK Parliament UK Progress on Reducing F-gas Emissions | Enhanced Reader. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvaud/469/469.pdf>

Scan the QR code for detailed guidance on each of the actions featured in the “Ten ways to implement sustainable greener healthcare in primary care respiratory practice”.



#### Acknowledgement

This resource is part of the PCRS Greener Healthcare Initiative. Learn more on the PCRS website: [www.pcrs-uk.org](http://www.pcrs-uk.org).

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