



**National Academy of Medicine  
Action Collaborative on Decarbonizing the U.S. Health Sector  
Climate Collaborative**

Commitment Statement  
March 10, 2022

Established in Morristown, Tennessee in 1960, Cherokee Health Systems (CHS) is a large, non-profit comprehensive community healthcare organization that is both a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) and licensed Community Mental Health Center with 43 clinics in 13 counties in Tennessee. Since its establishment, CHS has focused on the provision of care to medically vulnerable and underserved populations. Over time, CHS' service area has expanded in east Tennessee and reached southward to Chattanooga (2014) and westward to Memphis (2016) in order to address unmet healthcare needs in high demand areas. CHS' mission is "To enhance the quality of life of area residents through a comprehensive service delivery system that promotes mind and body wellness." CHS offers 1) pediatric and adult primary care services, including early childhood evaluation/assessment/treatment, preventive health services and education, specialized cardiology and dermatology care, a women's health clinic with a focus on high-risk obstetrics, routine laboratory tests and X-rays; 2) behavioral health services, including child, adolescent, adult, family, and group assessment and intervention, outpatient psychiatric services, alcohol and drug services, medically assisted treatment, intensive case management, evaluation and treatment of developmental disorders, school psychology services, crisis intervention, community outreach, 3) dental services (preventive and restorative), 4) pharmacy services that include clinical pharmacy interventions and a 340B program.

CHS is committed to the pursuit of health equity and, in 2020, established a Health Equity Committee to guide the organization's efforts in this area. CHS recognizes that climate change and the reduction of carbon-intensive practices must be addressed as part of comprehensive efforts to protect human health, well-being and equity. Regarding **health care delivery**, CHS has reduced carbon emissions with its support of a hybrid work-from-home model, especially for clinicians who live at some distance from their primary clinical location. CHS stopped the practice of mailing registration packets to all new patients, which has reduced paper use and waste. Although paper usage remains high, CHS has contracted with a shredding service that recycles the paper documents that are shredded; all clinics are outfitted with multiple shred boxes and staff use these for ethically required shredding and routine recycling. Most CHS clinics also have a system in place to recycle plastic, aluminum, tin, and cardboard; from March 2009-2016, the liaison for this project published a blurb about environmentally sustainable practices in the bi-weekly employee newsletter. In terms of **health care infrastructure**, CHS considers carbon-reduction and energy efficiency during all new construction and remodeling projects as well as purchases of day-to-day operating supplies.

Despite these efforts, CHS recognizes that more can be done and is eager to learn with and from other organizations participating in the National Academy of Medicine's Climate Collaborative.