

Executive Summary and Reflections from Phase 1 (2021-2023)

Introduction

In September 2021, the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) launched its [Action Collaborative on Decarbonizing the U.S. Health Sector](#) (Climate Collaborative) – part of the NAM’s [Grand Challenge on Climate Change, Human Health, and Equity](#) (Climate Grand Challenge). The Climate Collaborative is a public-private partnership, bringing together interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral leaders from across the health system and related communities to reduce the environmental impacts of the health sector and strengthen its sustainability and resiliency. The Climate Collaborative focuses on key areas of opportunity, each aligning with a respective working group, including health care supply chain; health care delivery; health professional education and communication; and policy, financing, and metrics.

During Phase 1 of the Climate Collaborative, the NAM brought together 130+ interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral leaders from across health care and related communities to co-develop and implement a shared climate and health action agenda. Of that number, 70+ organizations joined the Climate Collaborative during Phase 1 as Network Organizations, that actively supported and contributed to the work of the Climate Collaborative. During that time, the Climate Collaborative hosted 3 public sessions, 5 member meetings, and 70+ working group meetings, in addition to producing over [30 outputs and resources for the health sector](#).

Background

While transformation is necessary across all major systems, there was, and continues to be, an immediate, actionable opportunity to mobilize health professionals, health sector entities, and leadership to reduce the environmental impacts of the health sector and invest in climate resilience and sustainability. [Climate change is increasingly affecting the ability of the U.S. health care system to deliver safe, effective, and efficient care](#), yet simultaneously, the health care system is also contributing to climate change. The U.S. health care system accounts for nearly 20% of U.S. GDP, making it a major consumer of resources, both energy and material, and as a result, a major producer of waste and greenhouse gases. [It is estimated that the U.S. health sector is responsible for approximately 8.5% of U.S. carbon emissions](#), with these estimates only expected to rise.

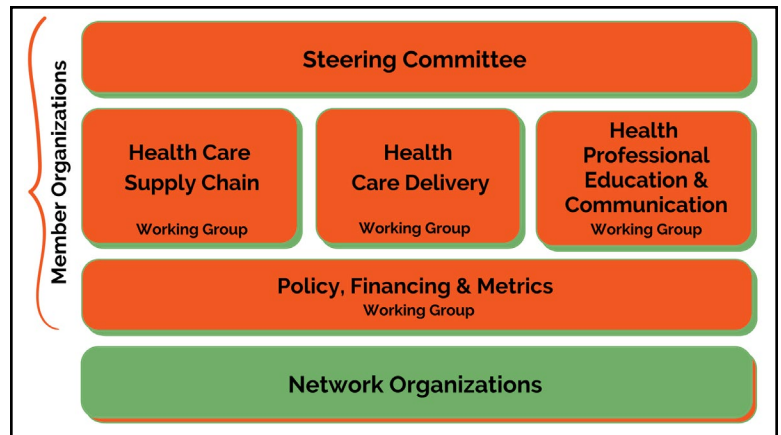
Given these factors, the NAM leveraged its objectivity, convening power, and community of experts to launch the Climate Collaborative. Working with and building upon current efforts and commitments, the goal of the Climate Collaborative is to mobilize the full spectrum of health sector actors and institutions, along with non-health collaborators, to act collectively to reduce the environmental impacts of the health sector and commit to sustainable transformation for the future. Importantly, the Climate Collaborative engages leadership at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and other agencies within the Biden Administration, as well as leaders from health and hospital systems, industry (including biopharmaceuticals, medical device companies, and suppliers), health system accrediting bodies, academia, nonprofits, and private payers, among others, as the United States moves to cut greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and completely by 2050. Bringing together the public, private, and non-profit sectors, the Climate Collaborative serves as a neutral platform for participants to set sustainability goals together, and to advance progress across priority areas through collaboration, coordination, communication, shared learning activities, and collective actions.

Phase 1 Overview

Operating on a two-year renewable cycle, with NAM intending to carry out at least three cycles, the first phase of the Climate Collaborative ran from September 2021 through December 2023. The Climate Collaborative is guided by a Steering Committee, comprised of four Co-Chairs, the co-leads of each Working Group, and several at-large members,

that leads the strategic direction of the Collaborative and its core activities. In Phase 1, Victor Dzau (NAM), Admiral Rachel Levine (HHS), Andrew Witty (UnitedHealth Group), and George Barrett (formerly Cardinal Health) served as Co-Chairs. The Steering Committee affirms each workstream’s focus areas, objectives, and work plans, as well as guides the membership and outputs of the Working Groups.

Representatives of the Climate Collaborative’s Member organizations actively participate in one or more Working Groups focused on high-priority areas to reduce the carbon footprint of the health sector. Each Working Group includes ~15-20 representatives, which are multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary in composition, as well as three co-leads, who convene virtually each month to advance their goals and corresponding work plans. During and outside of these monthly meetings, Working Group participants support the conceptualization, development, and refinement of products (such as papers, issue briefs, statements, and webinars), as well as dissemination and outreach activities.



Climate Collaborative structure

Achievements and Outputs

During Phase 1, the Climate Collaborative brought together a diverse range of stakeholders and produced a variety of resources, outputs, and events to support the health sector’s decarbonization and sustainability efforts.

Meetings and Convenings

- [September 2021](#): NAM event to publicly launch the Climate Collaborative
- [March 2022](#): NAM event to feature perspectives on U.S. and international health sector decarbonization
- [October 2022](#): HHS-OCHE Webinar Series: Accelerating Healthcare Sector Action on Climate Change and Health Equity: Action Collaborative Tools and Supports
- [November 2022-January 2023](#): NAM Carbon Accounting 101 webinar series and related resources
- [April 2023](#): NAM event with featured panel, “Scaling Climate Action Across Health Care: Key Opportunities for Leadership, Innovation, Policy, and Research”
- April 2023: American Hospital Association Annual Membership Meeting executive session, “Pathways to Health System Sustainability and Decarbonization”
- June 2023: NAM Climate Education Leaders Convening
- [August 2023](#): NAM, Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), and Practice Greenhealth – Decarbonizing Health Care: Taking the Next Step to Reduce Your Organization’s Emissions
- November 2023: AMA House of Delegates Interim Meeting educational session, “The Climate Crisis: Pathways to Decarbonizing the U.S. Health Sector”
- [November 2023](#): NAM, IHI, HCWH, and Practice Greenhealth – Activating Health Professionals to Lead Climate Action
- Five closed Members Meetings, held on a biannual basis in Phase 1
- 70+ Working Group meetings



NAM President Victor Dzau attending COP28

Tools, Primers, and Focus Groups

- [Understanding Perspectives on Decarbonizing the U.S. Health Sector](#), summary of focus group and survey findings from diverse stakeholder and community engagement
- [Why Decarbonizing Matters for the U.S. Health Sector](#), primer on the case for decarbonization

- [Decarbonizing the Health Care Value Chain: A Call to Health Care Manufacturer, Distributor and Industry Organizations](#), primer on opportunities for action in the health care value chain
- [Sustainability Journey Map and Resource Repository](#), interactive visual tool outlining key stages of the sustainability journey for suppliers, with promising practices and toolkits
- [Key Actions to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions by U.S. Hospitals and Health Systems](#), shortlist for hospitals and health systems to reduce emissions

Publications

- [Accelerating Action to Decarbonize Healthcare in the U.S.](#)
- [Crossing the Decarbonization Chasm: A Call to Action for Hospital and Health System Leaders to Reduce Their Greenhouse Gas Emissions](#)
- [Decarbonizing the U.S. Health Sector – A Call to Action](#)
- [Embracing Sustainability Makes Good Business Sense](#)
- Series: Policy and Regulatory Priorities for Accelerating Health Care Decarbonization
 - » [How Health Care Organizations Can Use the Inflation Reduction Act to Reduce Costs, Enhance Resilience, and Lower Their Environmental Footprint](#)
 - » [Infection Prevention, Planetary Health, and Single-Use Plastics](#)
 - » [The Role of Payers in Achieving Environmentally Sustainable and Climate Resilient Health Care](#)
 - » Leveraging Digitization to Decarbonize Health Care – Prescriber Medicine Information as an Exemplar (*forthcoming*)
 - » Opportunities for Strengthening Climate Education for Health Professionals (*forthcoming*)

Features

- Making Strides in Sustainability: Health Leaders Share Lessons on Pathways to Climate Action: CEO interviews with [ChristianaCare](#), [CommonSpirit Health](#), [Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc.](#), and [Hospitals, MetroHealth, Providence](#), and [Stanford Health Care](#)
- COP28 Countdown: [Action Required: Climate Change Poses Dire Threats to Global Health and Well-Being](#)
- [Future Health Leaders Share Their Vision for Addressing Climate Change to Advance Health Equity](#), Earth Day 2023 quotes
- [Health Care Leaders Speak Out on Climate Change](#), video series
- [NAM Joins White House-HHS Health Sector Climate Pledge](#)



COP28 Countdown event (Photo: Rodney Bailey/Event Photojournalism)

Interviews and Podcasts

- American Medical Association: [National Academy of Medicine Action Collaborative is combating climate change with Victor Dzau, MD](#)
- Modern Healthcare: [Q+A with Victor Dzau, MD, President National Academy of Medicine](#)
- Popular Science: [Can we decarbonize surgical healthcare?](#)

Impact

From 2021 to 2023, the NAM, on behalf of the Collaborative, participated in several high-impact events to further raise awareness on health sector decarbonization and share resources produced from the Climate Collaborative—ranging from briefings and roundtables at the White House to Climate Week NYC and the [Forbes Sustainability Summit](#). The volume of external invitations for such events increased significantly during the second year of Phase 1, signaling the unique and trusted role of the NAM as a leader in health sector decarbonization.

Overall, the NAM's leadership has brought attention to the important role health care has in not only reducing its emissions but also being an influencer in climate action more broadly. Several members of the Climate Collaborative have made progress on these issues in unprecedented ways.

For example, in September 2023, The Joint Commission (“TJC”) announced a voluntary [Sustainable Healthcare Certification \(SHC\) program](#) for U.S. hospitals, acting upon requests from health care organizations that want to accelerate their sustainable practices and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The SHC program provides a framework to help organizations begin, continue, or expand their decarbonization efforts and to receive public recognition for their commitment and achievements in contributing to environmental sustainability. Dr. Jonathan Perlin, CEO of TJC and a member of the Climate Collaborative Steering Committee and co-lead of the Policy, Financing, and Metrics Working Group, attributes his involvement with this NAM initiative as an impetus of this certificate.

In addition, in April 2024, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation (CMS Innovation Center) announced its plan to launch a voluntary [Decarbonization and Resilience Initiative](#) as part of its proposed Transforming Episode Accountability Model (TEAM). This proposed initiative would invite acute care hospitals participating in TEAM to identify how they can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve patient outcomes through two elements: voluntary reporting on emissions and technical assistance on reducing emissions. Dr. Liz Fowler, Deputy Administrator and Director for CMS Innovation Center and co-lead of the Policy, Financing, and Metrics Working Group, attributes her involvement with the Climate Collaborative as a catalyst to launch this initiative.

Furthermore, the Climate Collaborative has had internal impacts. In October 2023, the NAM issued a [statement](#) on its commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by setting decarbonization targets and emissions reduction goals.

Accelerating the National Climate and Health Movement

In Phase 2, the Climate Collaborative will shift to an expanded model that focuses on actionable approaches to continue in a leadership role and supporting organizations across the nation on their climate and health journey. To achieve this, the NAM will launch the [Accelerating the National Climate and Health Movement](#) initiative that will be open to all health-related organizations interested in taking action to address climate change and its impacts on human health in their institutions, organizations, and communities. With numerous initiatives already underway in the climate and health space, including several by current Climate Collaborative members, the Movement will avoid duplicating these efforts and instead look to serve as a “home” for them to come together to share their work, exchange ideas, and promote their growth.

Modeled after successful initiatives like the Institute for Healthcare Improvement’s (IHI) 100,000 Lives Campaign, this movement will be the centerpiece of Phase 2 for the Climate Collaborative. It will aim to engage a broad swath of organizations and will have the following core attributes:

- Embody a “Big Tent,” inclusive approach by creating a low barrier to entry for interested organizations.
- Cultivate a positive, “waste no will,” “coalition of the willing” tone and approach that celebrates all successes in climate and health, including greenhouse gas reductions, climate resilience, etc.
- Serve as a catalyst for the entire health sector by providing guidance, resources, and facilitating relationships across participant organizations.
- Leverage NAM’s influence to drive awareness that addressing the health impacts of climate change should be part of the health sector’s mission.

During Phase 2, the NAM intends to mobilize the entire health sector’s engagement around climate and health, and scale coordinated action across the nation.

The Climate Collaborative is committed to continuing its leadership role as an unprecedented public-private partnership that leverages the independence and authority of the NAM to mobilize all parts of the health sector to establish shared goals for decarbonization and drive commitment to sustainable transformation. By focusing on high-impact, cross-cutting areas of opportunity, the Collaborative will continue to produce valuable resources, tools, and other products to accelerate action on addressing the health sector’s environmental impact.



Learn more at nam.edu/ClimateCollaborative.