

## Virginia Commonwealth University - VCU Health Sustainability

We as students and faculty urge VCU to take immediate action to prioritize sustainable practices and transparency in the VCU Health system.

1. **ONE Sustainability Plan** - Address concerns regarding the VCU ONE Sustainability plan such as including the health systems recommendations below in the ONE Sustainability Plan, and having a minimum funding requirement per year to ensure the continuity of the plan over time.
  - a. Establish emissions reductions benchmarks for the health system:
    - i. Aim to be carbon neutral by 2050.
    - ii. Aim to reduce 50% by 2030, as is commensurate with the percentage reduction specified by the 2018 IPCC Report to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, and to achieve 100% renewable energy sources by 2050.
2. **Data transparency** - Release statistics and data about VCU Health's environmental impact to the public
  - a. MISS calls on VCU Health to consult with experts in sustainability and other relevant fields in order to accurately determine and release information on water use, including the percentage of high-efficiency toilets, low-flow showerheads, and faucet aerators, wastewater treatment, biohazard waste management, including pharmaceutical active compounds (PHA<sub>C</sub>) and recalcitrant organic pollutants, and energy consumption and conservation measures, including releasing VCU Health-specific information comparable to the information released by the university regarding greenhouse gasses at the Monroe Park campus.
3. **Waste Management**- Be upfront about the replacement of reusable equipment and supplies to disposable technologies in different specialties. Strive to accomplish 50% of reduction in unnecessary waste by 2030 and 100% by 2050.
  - a. Increase awareness and knowledge about recyclable materials and plastics among healthcare workers
    - i. Medical plastics containing polyethylene (PE), polypropylene (PP), and high-density polyethylene (HDPE) are generally recyclable. Examples include sterilization wrap, irrigation bottles, basins, pitchers, trays, tyvek, flexible clear packaging, etc.
    - ii. Studies conducted on recycled polypropylene with differing compositions of both new and recycled medical plastics have "demonstrated that it is possible to incorporate more than 70% w/w of recycled polypropylene without affecting the mechanical properties" ([Joseph et al. 2021](#)).
  - b. Consult individual departments for waste production and evaluate the recyclability and reusability of materials produced
4. **Sustainability Practices** - Improve MCV campus sustainability practices and other facilities.
  - a. The VCU Medical School should implement a new elective to include planetary health and establish a thread of sustainability within the existing curricula, learning from other

institutions like UVA Medical School. The current curriculum only tangentially touches on key topics of sustainable living practices and how human health and the hospital system are deeply intertwined with environmental health

(<https://medschool.vcu.edu/education/medical-education/curriculum/>).

- b. VCU Medical School must incorporate concrete sustainability guidelines for events and enforce the sustainability suggestions listed for procurement  
(<https://procurement.vcu.edu/our-services/university-purchasing/sustainability/>).
  - c. Lab spaces must prioritize sustainability because there are currently no initiatives in place to decrease energy usage, improve water conservation, or more efficiently recycle and handle waste.
  - d. VCU's MCV Campus has yet to renovate a number of its older facilities to comply with LEED standards. Sustainable decisions among departments are encouraged but are not enforced. There should be a compost program implemented for students and faculty.
  - e. VCU Health must seek feedback from faculty and staff regarding the initiation and maintenance of green initiatives. VCU Health should look towards including more motion sensor lighting to conserve energy and low-flow toilets, shower heads, and faucets to conserve water.
  - f. Although VCU Health offers avenues for recycling such as through single stream recycling, the disposal bins are not clearly labeled and recycling practices are not enforced. These facilities should implement more green recycling bins and signage that better enforces these practices  
(<https://www.vcuhealth.org/our-story/who-we-are/better-environment-better-health>).  
There should be more transparency in regards to the processing of recycled materials, including annual statistics on carbon emissions, recycling, wastewater, energy sources, and more.
5. **GreenHealth** - Obtain membership in Practice GreenHealth, a program that offers resources for implementing sustainable practices in healthcare organizations as well as performance metrics
- a. 1 in 4 hospitals participate in the program
  - b. VCU would have the opportunity to achieve an Environmental Excellence Award by reporting data, increasing the university's transparency and appeal
  - c. A yearly membership would help VCU gain access to partners and information on strategies to reduce waste and emissions
  - d. Improvement categories include...
    - i. Building design
    - ii. Chemical use
    - iii. Sustainable procurement
    - iv. Food processing and disposal within the system
    - v. Water use
6. **Divestment** - divest from fossil fuels and invest in green businesses and research
- a. Unlike other health facilities, including UVA's Health system, VCU does not have a plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. VCU Health is currently not supporting the Biden administration's pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 50% by 2030 within the

health sector

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/30/fact-sheet-health-sector-leaders-join-biden-administrations-pledge-to-reduce-greenhouse-gas-emissions-50-by-2030/>. We currently propose VCU stand by a plan to aim for carbon

neutrality by 2050. VCU Medical School is not significantly decreasing carbon emissions and there have been little to no efforts to divest from fossil fuels. From 2022-2023, the McGlothlin Medical Education Center teaching building on the MCV campus sourced less than 1% of their energy from renewable sources.

- b. As a leader in research, VCU Health should be more proactive in seeking out research opportunities in the realm of sustainability. VCU Health should be more open about investments in greener businesses. There have been no recent efforts to divest from fossil fuels, and invest more in alternative energy sources like solar. Decreasing MCV's net emissions can begin by identifying and releasing statistics regarding major drivers of carbon emissions within hospital facilities.