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H.E.L.P
HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT LEADERSHIP PLATFORM
A PHFI AND HCWH GREEN HEALTH INITIATIVE

POLICY BRIEF • 2026

Advancing Climate-Resilient Healthcare Facilities in India

Evidence, Action, and Policy Priorities

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Climate change is increasingly putting pressure on health systems across India. Healthcare facilities are now expected to continue functioning during heatwaves, floods, water shortages, and other climate-related disruptions. Therefore, climate resilience is becoming a necessity rather than a choice. At the same time, healthcare delivery also contributes to environmental degradation through high energy consumption, excessive use of water, and the generation of large volumes of waste.

Experiences from hospitals across India show that climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable healthcare practices are both feasible and practical. Hospitals of different sizes have introduced measures that improve operational efficiency, reduce costs, and minimise environmental impact without affecting patient care. Some interventions require substantial investment, while many others are relatively low-cost and can be adapted across different healthcare settings.

This policy brief draws together lessons from sustainability initiatives implemented in Indian private hospitals and highlights key policy priorities for advancing climate-resilient healthcare. Although the examples are drawn largely from the private sector, the findings have wider relevance for India's public health system as well. Similar approaches can help strengthen continuity of services, improve resource efficiency, and better protect vulnerable populations during climate-related challenges.

Some interventions require substantial investment, while many others are low-cost and can be adapted across different healthcare settings.

Background, Context & Policy Relevance

India's healthcare system is becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate-related risks. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, water scarcity, and disruptions in energy supply are already affecting health facilities in many parts of the country. Hospitals depend heavily on uninterrupted infrastructure and resources to function effectively. Ensuring continuity of services during climate-related emergencies is therefore an important priority for the health system.

At the same time, healthcare facilities themselves place considerable pressure on natural resources and the environment. High energy consumption, extensive water use, biomedical waste generation, and dependence on conventional infrastructure contribute to environmental stress as well as rising operational costs. Although some hospitals have adopted innovative sustainability measures, efforts across the sector remain uneven and fragmented. There is still limited consolidated evidence to guide large-scale policy decisions, investments, and implementation strategies.

Public health facilities face additional constraints. Ageing infrastructure limited financial resources, and inadequate technical capacity often restrict the adoption of climate-responsive systems. Yet these facilities serve large populations across diverse geographic settings, including many vulnerable communities. Even modest improvements in sustainability and efficiency can therefore generate significant public health and financial benefits.

Importantly, India has already laid substantial policy and institutional mechanisms to facilitate the transition to climate-resilient healthcare. National initiatives like the National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health (NPCCHH), State Action Plans on Climate Change and Human Health, disaster preparedness and response mechanisms, renewable energy promotion, and water conservation programs all present significant opportunities for strengthening health-system resilience. For instance, recent efforts to boost rooftop solar adoption through targeted incentives demonstrate how policy support can rapidly scale sustainable infrastructure investments. Similarly, large national initiatives focused on water security and resource management offer additional avenues for enhancing resilience within healthcare facilities. Leveraging these existing platforms and experiences can help accelerate the integration of sustainability and climate resilience across the health sector.

To address the existing evidence gap, sustainability and climate resilience initiatives from selected private healthcare facilities in India were systematically documented and analysed. The initiatives covered multiple areas such as energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation, waste management, and resilient infrastructure design. Together, they offer practical and field-tested examples that can inform policy and implementation across the broader health sector.

The findings are particularly relevant for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and State Health Departments as they work to strengthen health systems for future climate challenges. Integrating sustainability into facility planning, infrastructure upgrades, financing mechanisms, and workforce capacity-building efforts can improve long-term resilience while also enhancing operational efficiency and service delivery.

Evidence from Practice

Experiences from hospitals across India clearly show that sustainability initiatives can deliver significant operational, environmental, and financial gains.

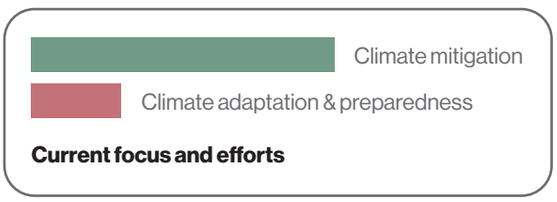
Many facilities that introduced energy-efficient systems, renewable energy, better water management, and improved waste segregation reported noticeable reductions in both resource use and operating costs. And importantly, none of these changes came at the cost of patient safety or quality of care.

What stands out from the evidence is that integrated, systems-based approaches work better than isolated actions. Hospitals that combined infrastructure upgrades with monitoring systems, active staff engagement, and strong leadership consistently performed better over time.

Some of the most effective measures were also the simplest. Smaller and medium-sized hospitals, in particular, benefited from low-cost interventions such as efficient lighting, BLDC fans, water-saving fixtures, routine preventive maintenance, and regular tracking of energy and water use. This required little upfront investment but produced steady long-term savings.

Digital tools added another layer of effectiveness. Building management systems, automated monitoring, and data-driven tracking helped hospitals optimize resource use while ensuring uninterrupted clinical operations.

However, the findings indicate that most of the current efforts are primarily focused on climate mitigation, particularly in reducing energy use and emissions. There is comparatively less focus on adaptation and preparedness, such as heat resilience, emergency response planning, water security, and infrastructure readiness for extreme weather.



Overall, the evidence is quite clear: sustainability doesn't compete with healthcare priorities. In many cases, it strengthens them.

Policy Gaps & Challenges

Despite promising examples, several systemic barriers continue to limit the scale and pace of climate action within the healthcare sector.

NO ROUTINE MONITORING

Most healthcare facilities do not routinely assess or monitor their environmental performance, making it difficult to identify priorities or measure progress.

LIMITED LEADERSHIP AWARENESS

Awareness and sensitization among institutional leadership remain limited, reducing the integration of sustainability into governance and operational planning.

INCONSISTENT WORKFORCE TRAINING

Workforce training on sustainable healthcare practices is inconsistent and often absent from routine capacity-building programmes.

LIMITED PEER LEARNING

Opportunities for peer learning, mentorship, and dissemination of successful models remain limited, particularly for smaller healthcare facilities.

MISALIGNED FINANCING

Existing policy frameworks and financing mechanisms are not adequately aligned to support long-term sustainability investments in healthcare infrastructure and operations.

Policy Recommendations

1

INSTITUTIONALIZE BASELINE ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING

Standardized assessment and monitoring of energy, water, and waste performance should become integral to routine healthcare facility management. Implementing recognized tools can help hospitals identify inefficiencies, prioritize investments, and track progress over time.

2

INTEGRATE SUSTAINABILITY INTO ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY STANDARDS

Accreditation systems are a powerful mechanism for institutionalizing sustainability across the healthcare sector. By incorporating sustainability and climate resilience indicators into healthcare accreditation frameworks, facilities will be encouraged to systematically assess and improve their environmental performance. Integrating these requirements into accreditation standards, including those used by national quality assurance bodies like NABH, will reinforce leadership commitment, improve accountability, and facilitate the routine adoption of sustainable practices in healthcare operations.

3

SENSITIZE LEADERSHIP AND STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

Climate resilience and sustainability require strong institutional ownership and leadership. Sensitizing senior leaders can help embed sustainability within governance, procurement, infrastructure planning, budgeting, and improving routine operations. Initiatives such as the Health and Environment Leadership Platform (H.E.L.P) demonstrate how leadership engagement can create an enabling environment for sustainability and climate action at both facility and health-system levels.

4

BUILD WORKFORCE CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE

The successful implementation of sustainability initiatives depends on the knowledge, skills, and engagement of healthcare staff at all levels. Regular training and capacity-building programmes for clinicians, nurses, administrators, engineers, facility managers, and support staff should be integrated into routine professional development. Strengthening staff capacity can help translate sustainability goals into practical actions related to energy efficiency, waste management, water conservation, and climate-resilient healthcare operations.

Policy Recommendations

5

PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOR THROUGH AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

Sustainable healthcare practices depend not only on infrastructure and technology but on day-to-day behaviour. Awareness campaigns, feedback mechanisms, recognition programmes, and staff engagement initiatives can encourage efficient resource use and foster a culture of environmental responsibility. Embedding sustainability into routine workplace practices can help achieve long-term behavioural change and maximise the impact of technical interventions.

6

ENABLE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND SCALING

Platforms that facilitate peer learning and the exchange of best practices can accelerate the adoption of proven interventions. Partnerships between large hospitals and smaller facilities can help transfer technical knowledge, operational experience, and practical implementation strategies.

7

STRENGTHEN MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATION AND CONVERGENCE

Achieving climate-resilient healthcare requires coordinated efforts across sectors beyond health. Collaboration among government ministries, regulatory bodies, financial institutions, technology partners, and development agencies is essential for creating an enabling environment for sustainable healthcare. For example, partnerships with the Ministry of Finance can support green financing and investment, while engagement with the Ministries of Commerce and IT can facilitate the development and adoption of innovative technologies. Collaboration with the International Cooperation Division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare can further enable access to global best practices, multilateral financing, and international knowledge exchange. Such convergence can help align policies, resources, and technical expertise to accelerate the scale-up of climate-resilient healthcare across India.

8

ALIGN POLICY, FINANCING, AND INCENTIVES

Supportive policies and financing mechanisms are critical for scaling climate-smart healthcare. Green financing instruments, targeted incentives, and sustainability-linked infrastructure support can motivate hospitals to invest in resource-efficient technologies and resilient systems.

Implication for Research & Practice

The documented experiences from Indian hospitals serve as a vital foundation for future research on sustainable healthcare. However, further evidence is required on long-term cost-effectiveness, health co-benefits, operational outcomes, and the impacts of climate resilience.

Moreover, implementation-focused research is needed to inform policy development, establish infrastructure standards, create financing models, and design operational frameworks tailored to the Indian context. Collaboration among policymakers, researchers, healthcare providers, and technical experts will be crucial in generating practical evidence to support scaling up these initiatives.

Conclusion

Climate-resilient healthcare is no longer a future consideration; it is an urgent necessity for strengthening India's health systems. Hospitals across the country demonstrate that sustainability initiatives can boost operational efficiency, cut costs, enhance resilience, and improve healthcare delivery.

To scale these efforts, we need supportive policy frameworks, strong institutional leadership, consistent financing, and enhanced technical capacity within the health sector. Strategic investments made today will help ensure that healthcare systems remain functional, responsive, and resilient against increasing climate challenges, while also safeguarding communities and the environment for the future.

Climate-resilient healthcare is no longer a future consideration; it is an urgent necessity for strengthening India's health systems.

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