



MEETING'S
PROCEEDINGS

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American Academy of Nursing Policy Dialogue

Nursing Leadership in Decarbonizing the Health Sector



Hosted by the Environmental & Public
Health Expert Panel

Nursing Leadership in Decarbonizing the Health Sector

Dialogue Occurred
**JANUARY
2023**

Hosted by the Environmental & Public Health Expert Panel

INTRODUCTION

In January 2023, the American Academy of Nursing (Academy) hosted a policy dialogue on “Nursing Leadership in Decarbonizing the Health Sector.” The Environmental & Public Health Expert Panel convened this dialogue to discuss the federal policy agenda associated with addressing the global crisis of climate change. The US Health Sector, as a community, has a responsibility to advocate for and invoke change at a global scale while addressing social inequities in developing solutions. This policy dialogue provided participants the opportunity to gain insights from leading experts in environmental justice, public health policy, climate resiliency, decarbonization, and grassroots initiatives in sustainable development. Participants were able to explore the critical role of the nursing profession’s engagement in cultivating policy solutions for environmental issues as well as the implications of those policies.

This document contains highlights of the event, including:

- A summary of the main session and guest speaker presentations, as well as the audience’s open discussion;
- Key takeaways; and
- Recommendations to leverage nursing leadership in the mitigation and resilience-building of the US health care sector against the climate change crisis.

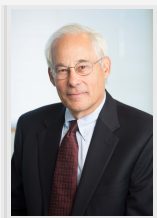


ABOUT THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NURSING

The American Academy of Nursing serves the public by advancing health policy and practice through the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of nursing knowledge. Academy Fellows are inducted into the organization for their extraordinary contributions to improve health locally and globally. With more than 3,000 Fellows, the Academy represents nursing’s most accomplished leaders in policy, research, administration, practice, and academia.

Expert Panels are one of the major forces within the Academy for developing new knowledge to transform health policy. Through consensus building and collaboration, Academy Expert Panels advance evidence-based solutions to the most complex health care challenges. By hosting Policy Dialogues, Expert Panels lead engaging discussions to further enhance awareness and develop policy proposals that work to achieve the Academy’s vision of healthy lives for all people.

Featured Speakers



Donald Berwick

MD, MPP
President Emeritus
and Senior Fellow
*Institute for
Healthcare
Improvement*



Elizabeth Schenk

PhD, RN, FAAN
Executive Director
of Environmental
Stewardship
Providence



Katie Huffling

DNP, RN, CNM,
FAAN
Executive Director
*Alliance of Nurses
for Healthy
Environments*



Beverly Malone

PhD, RN, FAAN
President and
Chief Executive
Officer
*National League
for Nursing*

Main Session Summary

Opening Keynote

Donald Berwick MD, MPP
President Emeritus and Senior Fellow, *Institute for Healthcare Improvement*

Dr. Berwick is a leading scholar, teacher, and advocate for continual improvement of health care systems. He is the founder and President Emeritus at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, a leading global nonprofit organization. In addition, Dr. Berwick is a pediatrician and a lecturer on Health Care Policy at Harvard Medical School. President Obama appointed him as Administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in 2010 and 2011. He is an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine and has received numerous awards including the Award of Honor from the American Hospital Association and the Gustav O. Leinhard Award from the National Academy of Medicine (NAM).

In his remarks, Dr. Berwick outlined the urgency of advocating for action to mitigate climate change and the necessity for the nursing profession to join the fight. He expressed that at a time when attention is in such short supply, the health care community must force this issue to the forefront. In 2021, the World Health Organization named climate change to be the single biggest health threat facing humanity.[1] Expressing that climate change is not a future issue, but rather one that is already prevalent in our lives, Dr. Berwick illustrated the current consequences we are facing as a nation, such as extreme weather events—floods, fires, and droughts.

“These consequences are existential threats as vulnerable communities are left dislocated and experiencing water and food scarcity.”
Donald Berwick

Even though some effects of climate change are already irreversible, Dr. Berwick called for actions that the nursing profession must take to mitigate the release of greenhouse gas emissions especially since health care is a big stakeholder in these emissions. The collective health care system accounts

for 8.5% of the United States' greenhouse gas emissions[2], and thus, the profession cannot take a bystander stance on this issue. Dr. Berwick addressed the types of emission sources contributing to climate change and asked participants to take action by joining working groups, seeking information and resources from organizations, preparing our health care workforce to be prepared, and examining approaches to care delivery (i.e., reducing over care, reuse of equipment, changing the kinds of gases used in anesthesia). He explained that by examining the supply chain, direct delivery, education, professional development, public policy, finance, and metrics, the nursing community can take the initiative to drive change at the heart of health care.

As “a unified nursing voice in this country...it will matter if nurses become vocal about this nationally; politically in the organizations you work in every day as well as the nursing profession in the country as a whole,” explained Dr. Berwick. Nursing is primed to utilize its professional nursing organizations and collective voice across the country to influence the environmental standards of the health care system.

Elizabeth Schenk

PhD, RN, FAAN
Executive Director of Environmental Stewardship, *Providence*

As the Executive Director of the Environmental Stewardship for Providence, a national, not-for-profit Catholic health system, Dr. Schenk is helping Providence lead its journey towards being carbon-negative by 2030. In addition, she is an assistant research professor at Washington State University College of Nursing. Dr. Schenk developed the Climate, Health, and Nursing Tool (CHANT) as a survey to measure health professionals' awareness, behaviors, and engagement with climate change and health. CHANT has been translated into several languages in addition to being utilized in over 30 countries. She also serves on the board of directors for the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, Montana Health Professionals for Health Climate, and Climate Smart Missoula. Dr. Schenk is the host of the Nurses for Healthy Environments podcast which is currently in its fifth season.

Dr. Schenk underscored what is meant by the decarbonization of health care, opportunities for nursing, and suggestions for policy development. As Dr. Schenk explained, the term “carbon” is shorthand for all greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and halogenated chemicals. Carbon dioxide is the most common greenhouse gas, consisting of about 79% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions from human activities[3], but it is not the strongest. The process of greenhouse gases getting trapped in the atmosphere is what has caused extreme weather events, such as solar vortices and extreme heat. Pollution from health care is also killing thousands of people a year, and as Dr. Schenk highlighted, “This issue is left systematically untended to and decarbonization is a tool to generate action to reduce harm.”

Dr. Schenk illustrated her work in bringing about efforts to become carbon-negative by 2030 with the We ACT Framework,[4] which groups five key sources of greenhouse emissions—these are waste, energy/water, agriculture/food, chemicals, and transportation. To achieve this in the health sector, she explained that Providence's efforts to become carbon-negative include:

- diverting half of the 91 million pounds of waste created each year in hospitals;
- aiming to use 100% renewable electricity by 2030;
- reducing the carbon intensity of meals served, and buying more sustainable and local food;
- reducing greenhouse gases from anesthetic agents and nitrous oxide; and
- reducing business travel by 50%.

She further explained the importance of transparency about business emissions and partnerships to reduce the health care sector's emissions from purchases and its influences on deciding how to deliver care. Dr. Schenk shared with attendees that climate-related issues do not impact everyone equitably and that the “more vulnerable members of our communities are hit the hardest...this leads us to address environmental justice issues in the communities we serve.”

In addition to these goals and models, Dr. Schenk suggested three opportunities for the nursing profession to act in environmental justice and specifically decarbonization:

- Nurses must practice in ways that do not harm, including harming our planetary balance. Planetary imbalance is an enormous driver of health risks, so nurses must bring problem-solving skills to every discussion;
- Nursing is based on deep ethicality. When nurses know their policies, practices, and purchases are causing harm historically, they must be addressed; and
- Decarbonization cannot be done without nurses and the profession must better leverage and assert their voice.

“Using our voice as the nation's most trusted profession, we can advocate for planet-safe decisions throughout all aspects of our government, economy, and the organizations in which we participate.”

Elizabeth Schenk

In conclusion, Dr. Schenk proposed policies to address decarbonization in health care such as efficiency standards in buildings and incentives for electric vehicles, which can drive hospitals to make shifts in operations. Dr. Schenk expressed that professional nursing organizations should work with national leaders, taking on the responsibility to create solutions to combat climate health concerns. Nurses are more than capable of weighing in by expressing support for policies that contribute to the decarbonization framework and ensuring wherever health care is practiced, decreasing greenhouse gases is a focus.

Katie Huffling

DNP, RN, CNM, FAAN
Executive Director, *Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments*

Dr. Huffling is a passionate supporter of not only nurse-led advocacy, but also healthier environments for all. As a certified nurse midwife, and the Executive Director of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE), Dr. Huffling works with nurses and other nursing organizations to elevate environmental health issues such as climate change, toxic chemicals, sustainability, and health care among nursing professionals. She received her DNP in Health Innovation and Leadership from the University of Minnesota. Dr. Huffling is a member of the Children's Health Protection Advisory Council at the Environmental Protection Agency. She received the Charlotte Brody Award in 2018. This award recognizes nurses who significantly contribute to the promotion of environmental health.

Dr. Huffling expressed that nursing engagement is crucial for initiatives in health care decarbonization. The nursing profession is the largest portion of the health care workforce and the Biden Administration's commitment to climate-related issues provides a unique opportunity for nurses to develop impactful shifts in policy.[5] In her remarks, Dr. Huffling identified the National Academy of Medicine's Action Collaborative on Decarbonizing the U.S. Health Sector's[6] goals and actions for decarbonization through four areas:

- health care supply chain and infrastructure;
- health care delivery;

- health professional education and communication; and
- health care policy, financing, and metrics.

Finally, Dr. Huffling shared that in committing to achieve these goals, the nursing perspective is a vital part of policy discussions and has made sure the people whom nurses serve are at the heart of the discussion. In June 2022, health care sector leaders made the Health Sector Climate Pledge,[7] representing over 650 hospitals nationwide as well as key players such as pharmaceutical manufacturers and insurance providers. In making this pledge a reality, Dr. Huffling outlined steps moving forward as nurses, as well as collectively in the health care industry.

Dr. Huffling highlighted the Administration's policies to combat climate change and decarbonization to support health equity for years to come. She added that to close gaps in hospitals and other health care institutions located in rural and low-income regions the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) should institute a reimbursement structure that gives credit to health systems that are engaging in decarbonization efforts and Medicare could also offer loans to low-resource hospitals to assist in decarbonization work. The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE) has already instituted a reimbursement structure that offers incentives to health sectors that are engaging in decarbonization efforts.[8] Additionally, through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)[9], the OCCHE offers loans to low-resource hospitals to assist in decarbonization work.

Dr. Huffling addressed the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) 2022 proposed rule to standardize climate-related disclosures, which would require publicly traded companies to provide robust reporting on climate risks in their greenhouse gas emissions and supply chain efforts.[10] This rule would limit current regulations that allow companies to withhold information considered proprietary and make it impossible for purchasing departments to determine the climate impacts of many of their product purchasing decisions. [11] Dr. Huffling stated "For example, a medical device that is made with nylon versus polypropylene would have two very different climate impacts. This new SEC rule would help health care institutions access the critical greenhouse gas metrics of the products they're purchasing so that they can accurately be tallied in their decarbonization efforts." She added that, through the IRA enactment, there is an allocation of funding to create climate solutions. Under the IRA, 40% of climate funding will go towards environmental justice and historically underserved communities.

"Nurses can play a critical role in ensuring the funds go to the communities most in need of support through infrastructure upgrades, access to renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, and climate adaptation plans."

Katie Huffling

Closing Keynote

Beverly Malone PhD, RN, FAAN
President and Chief Executive Officer, *National League for Nursing (NLN)*

As the President and CEO of NLN, Dr. Malone has led the advancement of nursing science and education by promoting greater collaboration among stakeholders, increasing diversity in nursing, and promoting excellence in care for patients. Dr. Malone is a dedicated lifelong learner who has held numerous nursing leadership positions in clinical practice and academia. She served two terms as President of the American Nurses Association, is a former Deputy Assistant Secretary

for Health at the Department of Health and Human Services, and a former General Secretary of the United Kingdom's Royal College of Nursing.

Dr. Malone opened with “Nurses care about the health of our nation, and care about the survival of our planet.” In her remarks, she shared that the nation cannot have healthy people without having a healthy planet. She referenced the NLN’s *2022 Education Summit: Healthy Planet, Healthy People: Leading the Way Through Education, Practice, and Policy*,^[12] which focused on the vital need for nurses and nurse educators to respond to and proactively address climate change, health equity, and sustainability in managing global health and wellness.

Dr. Malone measured the issue of climate change and action being made as a choice between “life and death; it is about people being whole and well-being.” Dr. Malone further stated “As nurses, we care about the health of our communities, families, and individuals.” Nurses are and can be bold and courageous in mitigation efforts to this crisis and take responsibility for the future health of the planet. Nurses should seize opportunities to build resilience, through actions at an individual, organizational, federal, state, and local policy level. Dr. Malone expressed, “It is time to be bold and courageous in mitigation efforts to this crisis, and taking responsibility...This is not just a nursing issue, and health care providers must link arms and do it together.” Dr. Malone closed the discussion by calling for excellence in tackling climate change's effects on the US health care sector. She explained, “Excellence is co-creating and implementing transformative strategies. We have to co-create, implement, and develop transformative strategies through nursing’s daring ingenuity.”

“I want to motivate nurses to study and politicize decarbonization and assess the problem with fellow health care providers in taking action against climate change.”
Beverly Malone

Breakout Sessions

To facilitate open dialogue, participants joined three separate breakout panel discussions on different themes explored by the guest panelists.

Decarbonization through Federal Policy

Participants in the breakout session discussed the power of having a communication toolkit in rulemaking, developing policy targets for decarbonization at the federal level, and innovating how nurses can engage to decarbonize the health sector. Nursing organizations have been proven incredibly effective in addressing decarbonization and highlighting the nursing perspective. Participants also discussed the value of collective action in gaining awareness and framing decarbonization as an initiative in which all must take part. In finding common ground, nurses can act as leaders to address environmental and public health issues directly. Participants discussed the value of accessibility data and educational resources for collaborating and building a community that shares and evolves innovative ideas, allowing them to come to fruition. Alignment across the profession is pivotal in having a higher level of dialogue, especially since nurses remain a trusted voice in finding solutions. Participants concluded the discussion by focusing attention on taking leadership through innovative ideas and using the various accessible data resources and professional organizations to inform national leadership and shape policymaking.

Decarbonization through Health Care Systems Policy

Participants discussed how local and state policy systems can propel the decarbonization of the health care system. Participants examined the value of incentivizing health systems to provide better care, and better-quality outcomes for decarbonization through, for example, reimbursement from CMS. Participants then discussed the importance of hospitals and health care facilities in diminishing their footprint, such as limiting the use of disposable, single-use products. Capturing the meaningful use of system innovation and adoption, and working with national leaders to develop a decarbonization roadmap, are critical in this regard. Roadmaps must address the three scopes of decarbonization, both indirect and direct, by developing policy and operational mandates on topics from energy efficiency to food waste at the state and local levels. At the state and local health system levels, participants emphasized the importance of developing partnerships in the community and with state leaders to help shape state and federal policy.

Participants discussed the VA hospitals that have made systematic movements towards innovating health care by mandating action for minimizing their carbon footprint as an example. Another example included using state funding from the IRA, to create incentives at the state level for expanding the infrastructure for decarbonization. The use of these resources, made possible through the state distribution of federal funding, makes the application of innovative ideas and strategic goals tangible for health care institutions to act in addressing their carbon footprint and influence state mandates. Participants also discussed that there should be accessible, comprehensive data output systems and personalized education to overcome any gaps in knowledge in the general process and consequences of carbonization. With further accessibility, health systems can assess and reduce the health care sector's carbon footprint.

Decarbonization Through Professional Organizations' Policy

Participants identified the importance of professional organizations in expanding toolkits for nurses and strategic planning for decarbonization. Professional organizations have a role in supporting and urging further publications to build foundational knowledge and definitions for climate action as well as influencing policy implementation. Organizing avenues for sustainable practices within professional organizations allows for members' learning and ability to interact critically and ultimately innovate systems. Professional organizations can disseminate processes for nursing perspectives and expand those perspectives in policy. Participants called for a toolkit that allows for comprehensive guidelines, providing an opportunity to make personal, professional, and organizational commitments and actions to protect public health and limit the emission of greenhouse gases. Preparing nursing students to address these issues and develop a sustainable culture is important as well.

Connecting the environment and the socioecological roots of diseases to declining health in communities experiencing climate change is essential. Participants proposed that moving forward, it will take an interdisciplinary community of actors in professional organizations to drive the systematic changes necessary to decarbonize the health sector. Health care providers will need to become leaders in explaining the direness of re-imagining for a sustainable future by explaining the social cost. Long-term investments through organizations' leadership can ignite decarbonization across the health care sector.



Key Takeaways



Nurse Engagement's Value for Innovative Advancement of Decarbonization

By engaging in decarbonization initiatives within health care as leaders, nurses can lay the foundation for the necessary collaboration needed to create lasting change.



Investment in Supporting Health Care Sector Decarbonization Efforts

Federal investment must be directed toward researching, analyzing, as well as crafting policies and innovative systems that support health care providers in addressing the urgent need for action against the climate crisis.



The Pandemic Drew Attention to Sustainable Practices

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an expansion of single-use products. With the degrowth of sustainability nationally,[13] support is needed to rebuild individual and collective consciousness for implementing best practices against climate change.



Resiliency in Creating System Changes for Climate Action

The profession must remain diligent in the development and innovation of strong, sustained shifts within the health care sector to ensure a planet that supports life and health.



Collaborative Action must be Made to Mitigate Health Care Sector Carbon Emissions

Combating climate change is an issue of environmental and public health. Thus, it is a crisis that will take a cooperative effort to mold social advancement that prioritizes collective humanity.



Expansion of Accessible Educational Resources

Climate change is a complex topic and it requires tools and resources to make communication and information easily accessible to nurses. Expanding nurses' tools to educate, address, and discuss decarbonization through resources allows them to inform and champion the current health consequences of climate change.

Recommendations

1. Support the creation of health care organizations dedicated to reimagining the current resources, infrastructure, and roles in the health system for combating climate change.
2. Expand policies regarding health care infrastructure, preparation of the health care workforce, educational resources, disaster preparedness, and systematic mandates to implement resilient and committed efforts for a sustainable future.
3. Implement incentives to invest in operational advancements and sustainable practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
4. Innovate health care methods and practices to support nurses' leadership in expediting decarbonization.

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