

HUNTER NEW ENGLAND LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT

Media Release



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Carbon and waste neutral by 2030

Hunter New England Local Health District (HNELHD) will be carbon and waste neutral by 2030.

Under the ambitious new initiative, Sustainable Healthcare: Together Towards Zero 2030, the Local Health District (LHD) is setting its sights on an environmentally sustainable vision for the future.

HNELHD Chief Executive, Mr Michael DiRienzo, said significant investments will be made in solar power, water sustainability and energy efficient practices in coming years to lighten and, eventually, eliminate the organisation's carbon footprint.

"I am so proud to launch this important strategy today," Mr DiRienzo said. "The LHD will be doing a huge amount of work in coming years to achieve its green vision and take its place as an industry and community leader in sustainability."

"Health staff and services work incredibly hard to keep our community healthy," he said.

"At the same time, we know 25 per cent of all human disease and death in the world is attributed to unhealthy environments, like unclean air and water, and that health as an industry is a major contributor of carbon emissions. The reality is, it's no longer possible to be committed to the health of our community without addressing the health of our environment.

"In response, we're taking a giant step towards clean, green healthcare, investing in solar power, exploring sustainable water practices, reducing waste to landfill and much more.

"Work starts today, so we can leave behind a truly healthy legacy, for our generation and many generations to come."

In coming years, solar panels will be installed on the rooftop of all of health facilities, including John Hunter Hospital, which will soon be home to the largest solar panel installation on any hospital in the country.

The \$3.2 million solar panel installation is set to be the biggest in Australia, with panels covering 12,000 square metres, about 85 per cent, of the hospital's roof space.

"The District already has a head-start on its solar panel targets," Mr DiRienzo said.

"We're already harnessing clean, renewable power at a number of hospitals and work is underway to begin panel installation on more facilities in coming months. Our work will also significantly contribute to the state's Net Zero Plan aspirational solar target."

The District is also working to achieve zero general waste to landfill by 2030.

"We're now investigating innovative ways we can approach the everyday disposal of food scraps, general waste and recycling," Mr DiRienzo said.

"We'll also be taking a closer look to see what health-specific waste normally thrown in the rubbish, like oxygen masks, PVC tubing, and clean, single-use plastics used every day in our operating theatres, are appropriate and safe for recycling."

The recent drought, arguably the worst NSW has ever seen, was the catalyst for key water sustainability initiatives to be introduced under the bold initiative.

"Within the next decade, we will be aiming to collect 100 per cent of the rainwater that falls on our hospitals' rooftops," Mr DiRienzo said.

"We'll also be working with staff to find appropriate ways to reuse and recycle water to make the most of the precious resource at each hospital site."

An award-winning strategy is already putting clean, excess water, produced as a by-product of renal dialysis, to good use at Tamworth Hospital.

The excess 50,000 litres a week was once considered wastewater, but is now used to flush hospital toilets. With an investment of \$15,000, the hospital is now saving 2.5 million litres of clean water going down the drain each year. This simple yet effective initiative will be rolled out to 10 more renal units in the LHD in coming years.

The LHD's fleet of work vehicles is also going green. Hybrid electric cars will be gradually phased in, replacing petrol and diesel vehicles.

"Wherever possible, our staff will use video conferencing to reduce unnecessary travel for everyday business, and when they need to drive it will be cleaner than ever," Mr DiRienzo said.

"Gradually, fleet vehicles will be transitioned to hybrid electric models, replacing petrol vehicles, and e-charging stations will be installed on our sites.

We'll also be making it easier for staff to carpool or ride their bikes to work and when they travel out of town for work we'll identify preferred 'green' accommodation and flight providers."

Mr DiRienzo said the plan sets out a very comprehensive but achievable roadmap for how the LHD work towards its long-term goals.

"It's clear we have some very ambitious plans in place, and we're invested whole-heartedly to this commitment," Mr DiRienzo said.

"I'm so proud of the work we've done to date and we're only just getting started.

"The healthcare industry presents many opportunities for change and I'm sure enhancements in technology and further creative thinking around sustainability will present more chances to build on our vision."