



ST. JOSEPH'S • ST. MICHAEL'S • PROVIDENCE

**UNITY HEALTH**  
TORONTO

# SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

2023-24

# Land Acknowledgement

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Unity Health Toronto acknowledges that the land on which we live, work, and operate on, Tkaranto, is part of the Dish with One Spoon Covenant territory and is the traditional and ancestral lands of many Nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabek, the Haudenosaunee, the Chippewa, and the Wendat Nations. It is land that is part of Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit in 1787, also known as the 'Toronto Purchase', which was revisited in 1805 and 2010. It is still home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples. By acknowledging the land, we acknowledge our treaty responsibilities in sharing this land and to the Indigenous people who have been the traditional caretakers of this land since time immemorial.

When Treaty 13 was revisited in 1805, the Crown purchased 250,830 acres of land for 10 shillings, while the Mississaugas of the Credit retained exclusive fishing rights on Etobicoke Creek, and received various goods as part of the agreement. The land on which Unity Health stands today, specifically Lots 6, 7, 8 (St. Michael's Hospital), 35 (St. Joseph's Health Centre), and 33 (Providence Healthcare), was granted or sold by the Crown to Elizabeth Johnston, George Playter, and Robert Tait, respectively. Through several changes in ownership, all three properties ultimately came under the ownership of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

We would like to acknowledge that Treaty 13 was not a fair exchange of resources, as it significantly undervalued the land and failed to provide equitable compensation to the Mississaugas of the Credit. Despite the claim settlement in 2010, which resulted in an additional financial compensation of \$145 million, this settlement does not rectify the historical injustices and the long-term impacts of the treaty's unfair terms. The original transaction deprived the Indigenous peoples of their land and resources, affecting their cultural, social, health, and economic well-being for generations. We recognize that true reconciliation requires ongoing efforts to address these past wrongs and to restore and honor the rights and traditions of the Indigenous communities.

The definition of planetary health acknowledges human disruptions to the Earth's natural systems ultimately affect human health, but it is remiss in acknowledging the impact of these disruptions to the displacement of Indigenous peoples from the land. In Indigenous worldview, the land is human beings' first mother, a living entity that sustains and nurtures all life in a holistic manner. Indigenous people

lived for millennia in harmony with all life forms stemming from and co-existing on the land; and all of which were integral to their health and well-being as Indigenous Nations. We recognize that the Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of this disruption and the cumulative effects of loss of access to the land and climate change due to their deep interrelationship with the environment and its resources. Climate change exacerbates the challenges they already endure, including adequate shelter, political and economic marginalization, food security, loss of land and resources, human rights violations, discrimination, and unemployment.

*"We recognize that the Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of this disruption and the cumulative effects of loss of access to the land, and climate change due to their deep interrelationship with the environment and its resources."*

Recognizing these injustices, the actions presented in this Sustainability Report only represent a small seed relative to the full breadth of reconciliation work required and does not absolve us of our ancestors' wrong doings. We must take the time to continue to nurture that seed. Unity Health's sustainability journey is inspired by the Seventh Generation Principle, rooted in ancient Indigenous philosophy, which urges us to consider the impact of the decisions we make today on the next seven generations in every deliberation. We are dedicated to learning from the traditional knowledge and practices of the Indigenous peoples, who have long practiced environmental stewardship. We aim to rebuild our relationship and connection to the land and integrate it into our daily work.

*"Unity Health's sustainability journey is inspired by the Seventh Generation Principle, rooted in ancient Indigenous philosophy, which urges us to consider the impact of the decisions we make today on the next seven generations in every deliberation."*

We express our gratitude to the Indigenous peoples for their enduring wisdom and leadership in protecting the environment. We commit to honoring their legacy and working together towards a more sustainable and equitable future for all. In this Sustainability Report, we humbly present to you what we have accomplished so far and urge you to learn, engage with, and join us on our journey ahead.

# A message from the Executive Team

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**Dean Martin**

Executive Vice President of Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer  
Sponsor of the Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee



**Michael Keen**

Vice President of Facilities and Planning

As we reflect on the past year, we are pleased to present Unity Health Toronto's Sustainability Report for 2023-24. Unity Health recognizes the imperative of reducing our environmental impact, and it is with great pride that we share the progress, achievements, and commitments made towards a healthier, more sustainable future.

*"We recognize the interconnectedness between environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and the delivery of high quality health care services."*

Sustainability is deeply engrained in our mission to provide compassionate physical, emotional, and spiritual care, and advance excellence in health care through world-class education, research, and innovation. We recognize the interconnectedness between environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and the delivery of high quality health care services. We have been committed to Project Connect - planning and implementing Epic Systems (Epic), a network-wide electronic patient record (EPR) system. While this has diverted some of our capacity from sustainability, it will help us positively impact quality care, patient experience, and operational excellence across Unity Health. Project Connect will allow us to leverage data to enable us to make better decisions and develop a more robust report going forward. Meanwhile, we have continued to prioritize sustainability initiatives across our network of hospitals, including St. Joseph's Health Centre, St. Michael's Hospital, and Providence Healthcare. We are committed to reducing our environmental footprint, fostering a culture of wellness and inclusivity, and contributing positively to the communities we serve.

As we continue on this journey, it is important to highlight that our Sustainability Plan 2024-29 includes key targets for our organization, which will be detailed further in this Sustainability Report. These targets are integral to our overall strategy, requiring collaboration and dedication from all levels of our organization. Unity Health remains steadfast in integrating sustainability into our operations, and the Sustainability Report serves as a platform to showcase our efforts.

As we move forward, we remain dedicated to advancing sustainability practices within our organization and beyond. We understand the importance of continuous improvement and are committed to setting ambitious goals to further our impact on environmental conservation, social equity, and economic prosperity.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our dedicated staff, patients, partners, and stakeholders for their unwavering support and collaboration in achieving our sustainability goals. Together, we can create a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable future for all.

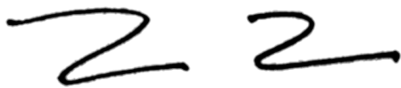
Thank you for your continued trust and partnership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DMartin". The letters are cursive and connected.

Dean Martin

Executive Vice President of Corporate Services & Chief Financial Officer  
Sponsor of the Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink consisting of two stylized, cursive '2' characters.

Michael Keen

Vice President of Facilities and Planning

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Path Forward

# Sustainability Strategy

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As part of our Strategic Plan 2019-26, Unity Health is committed to investing in our future – we will build a more nimble culture that makes decisions through a value lens and will be stewards of the environment by reducing the impact we have on the planet on our journey towards sustainability and net-zero health care. We recognize that safeguarding the health of our planet is integral to achieving our vision of providing the best care experiences. Created together.

Our Sustainability Strategy was founded on four key pillars: energy, redevelopment, procurement, and culture and engagement.

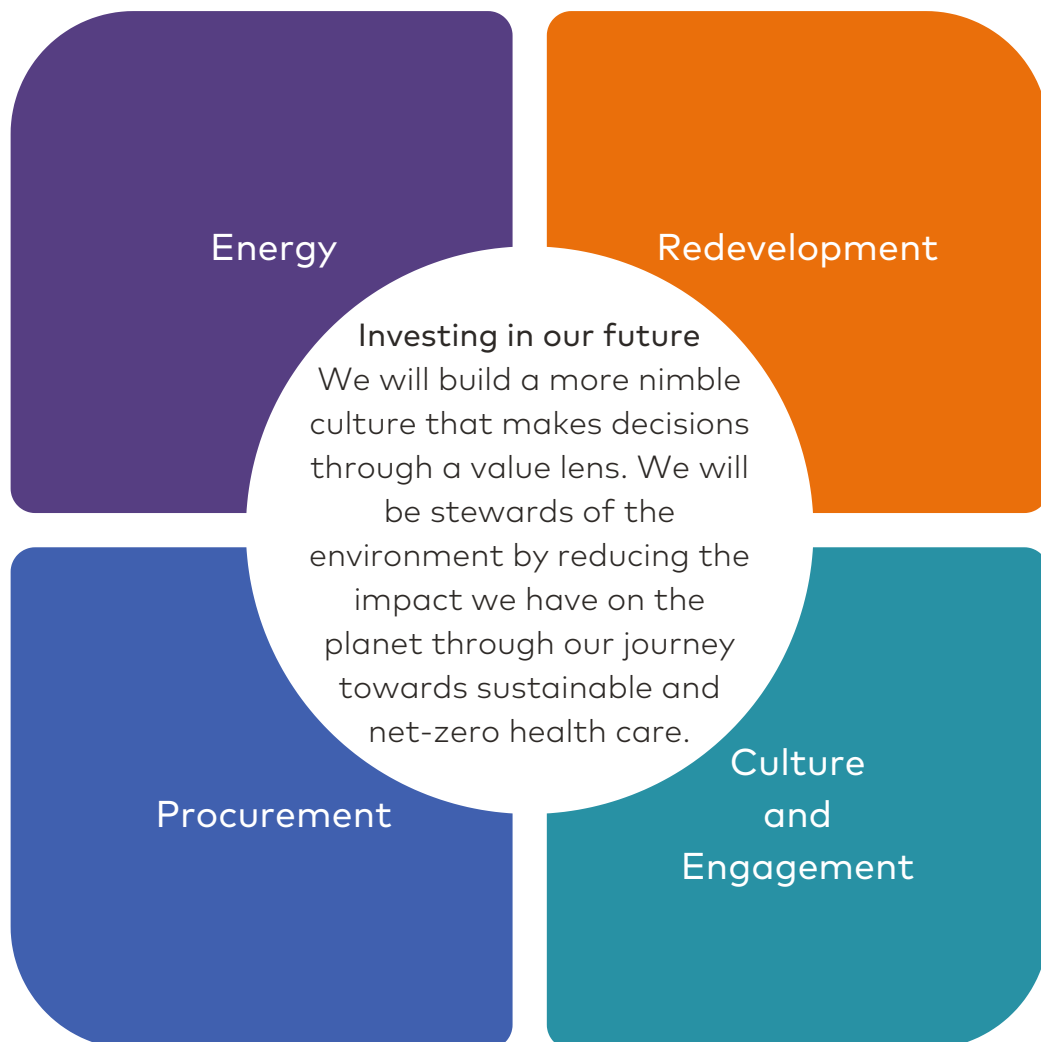


Figure 1. Unity Health Sustainability Strategy.

# Sustainability Goals

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As we embark on this journey, it is essential to highlight the key targets set for our [Sustainability Plan 2024-29](#) for each of the pillars of our Sustainability Strategy.

## Energy

- Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in existing facilities by 50 per cent by 2040.
- Reduce GHG emissions in existing facilities by 20 per cent by 2030.

## Redevelopment

- Set and monitor sustainability targets and key performance indicators for each project that support the Sustainability Plan.

## Procurement

- Build awareness of the impacts of climate change on procurement and supply chain.
- Engage with our suppliers to communicate our sustainability values to learn and collaboratively advance our climate mitigation and resiliency efforts.
- Incorporate equity, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability scoring into the procurement criteria.
- Reduce food-related GHG emissions: reduce red meat menu options by 60 per cent and increase plant-forward menu options by 60 per cent by 2030 and reduce food and disposable item waste by 75 per cent by weight by 2035.

## Culture and Engagement

- Continue to build capacity and knowledge across the organization to reduce direct and indirect GHG emissions.
- Bring awareness and visibility to climate change risks.



# Leading

Unity Health is leading transformative change to improve sustainability within our organization and the greater health care system. We are integrating sustainability into senior leadership portfolios and strategic planning, and establishing governance structures for reporting and accountability.

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Unity Health is prioritizing sustainability in its organizational strategy and decision-making by integrating within corporate goals, strategic plans, and performance monitoring and reporting.

The Strategic Plan 2019-26 emphasized "investing in our future" as one of nine strategic priorities, aiming to "build a more nimble culture that makes decisions through a value lens and will be stewards of the environment by reducing the impact we have on the planet".



Figure 2. Unity Health Strategic Priorities 2019-26.

We are proud to share that sustainability is a part of our 2024-25 strategic indicators and targets that focuses on transforming our physical infrastructure while being environmental and financial stewards to support the best care experiences.

The Unity Health Annual Report 2023-24 is the first to formally incorporate sustainability milestones, stories, and language throughout.



Image 1. Unity Health Growing Together Annual Report 2023-24.

The upcoming 2024-25 Quality Improvement Plan will also be the first to formally incorporate sustainability, recognizing that in order to achieve high-quality care, we must consider and employ environmentally sustainable health care practices across all dimensions of quality.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Building team capacity, awareness, engagement, and resources to foster and support sustainability is fundamental in achieving our sustainability goals. As a part of this effort, we have engaged with multiple departments to integrate sustainability within their respective organizational functions.

Here are some examples:

- Leadership and Organizational Development led the development and implementation of the Sustainable Events Checklist, ensuring that all events across Unity Health have limited environmental impact. In addition, we worked closely with them to build awareness and engagement around sustainability at the People Appreciation BBQs, some of the organization's largest gatherings. Our collaboration extended to the Joy Fund, where we served on the Steering Committee and supported the recent Garden Wall project, highlighting our commitment to promoting biodiversity and wellness.



**Image 2.** St. Joseph's Spotlight on Sustainability 2024 - Dr. Ali Abbass, Anesthesiologist, Laurie Thomas, Senior Clinical Director of Surgery, and the operating room team.

- Patient Family Partners will be engaged in reviewing sustainability initiatives going forward, and sustainability has been incorporated into the Patient and Family Partner Program Year in Review 2023-24.
- In collaboration with the Mission and Values team, the inaugural Spotlight on Sustainability was developed in 2024 as a part of Our Shared Values Awards, to recognize individuals and teams of Sustainability Champions who have made a positive impact on the planet, community, and organization in a way that exemplifies our missions and values.

We have resourced the following cross-functional staff to guide and support organization-wide sustainability initiatives.

**26** Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee (ESAC) Members

**14** Departments which have integrated sustainability

**79** Sustainability Champions

**4** Dedicated Staff

**+16%**

Sustainability Champions from 2022 to 2023.

# Caring

Unity Health is committed to providing health care that is high-quality, attentive to the effects of climate change on care, and conscious of the environmental footprint of care. Our vision of "*Best care experiences. Created together.*" underscores this commitment. By integrating sustainability into our health care practices, we ensure that our care not only meets the highest standards of excellence but also addresses the critical impact of climate change on health outcomes.

## APPROPRIATE CARE

We are reducing our environmental impact by ensuring that care provided is appropriate, high-quality, and reduces the demand for services, such as avoiding unnecessary tests, procedures, and medications.

Founded by St. Michael's in 2002, the Ontario Transfusion Coordinator (ONTraC) Program is a network of 25 hospital sites working in collaboration to implement best practice in patient blood management to reduce red blood cell transfusions, improve some patient outcomes, reduce health care costs, and reduce the associated environmental impact.

Through Choosing Wisely Canada, St. Joseph's and St. Michael's are designated Using Blood Wisely hospitals committed to decrease inappropriate red blood cell transfusion practices.



Image 3. Using Blood Wisely Hospital Designation.

In order to achieve and maintain their status, they must regularly audit a sample of their red blood cell transfusions to ensure that:

- At least 65% of red blood cell transfusions are single unit transfusions; and
- At least 80% of inpatient red blood cell transfusions have a pre-transfusion Hb 80 g/L or less.

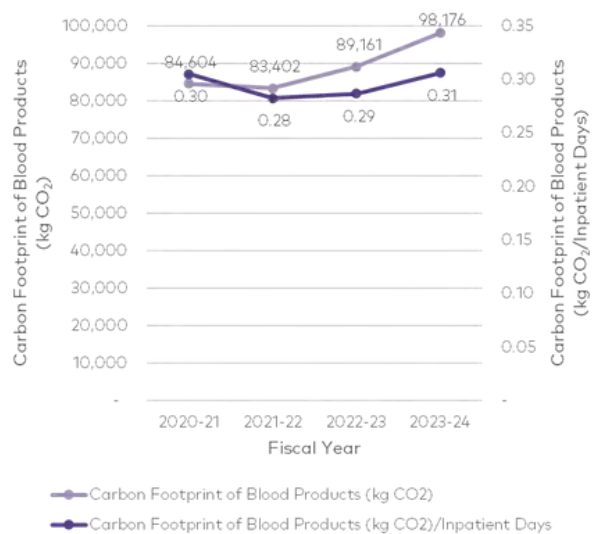


Figure 3. St. Joseph's and St. Michael's Carbon Footprint of Blood Products 2020-23.<sup>12</sup>

1. Assumption: 6.5 kg CO<sub>2</sub>/blood product. Hibbs, S. P., Thomas, S., & Murphy, M. F. (2021, December 21). Convergence of zero carbon healthcare with Patient Blood Management. The BMJ. <https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3112>

2. Blood products include red blood cells and platelets transfused.

Although Providence is not yet a designated hospital under Choosing Wisely Canada, they implemented a quality improvement project in collaboration with hematologists at St. Joseph's and St. Michael's, which reduced emergency department visits for red blood cell transfusions by half with the introduction of intravenous iron infusions and hematology e-consults.

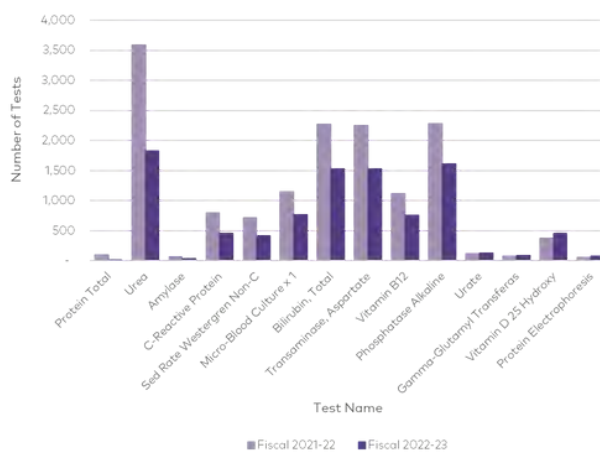


Figure 4. Providence Number of Tests (Top Decreased and Increased) F2021-22 vs. F2022-23.



Image 4. Using Labs Wisely Hospital Designation.

St. Joseph's, St. Michael's, and Providence are committed to making a measurable impact on reducing low-value lab testing. Key initiatives that have been implemented across Unity Health, include:

- Clinician education
- Removal of laboratory test groups on requisitions (AST/ALT, LFTs, urea, ESR)
- Automatic cancellation of repetitive 25-hydroxy Vitamin D testing

St. Joseph's and St. Michael's are designated Using Labs Wisely hospitals, underscoring their commitment to sustainable lab utilization.



Image 5. Coolfood Image.

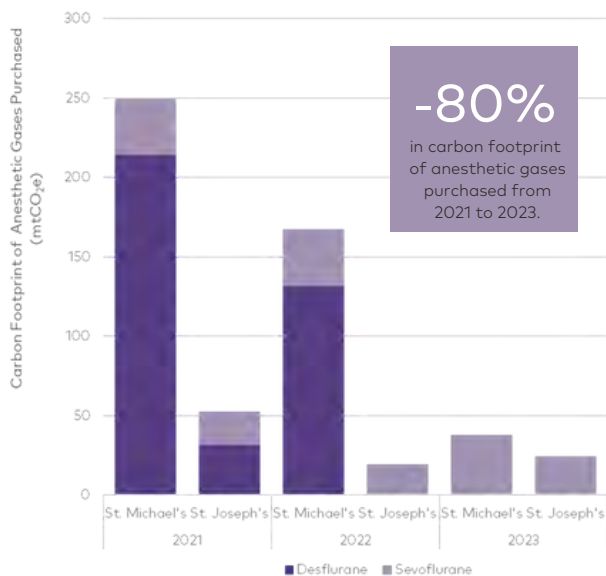
As part of Nourish's Planetary Health Menus Program, Unity Health has been working to reduce the environmental impact of our food offerings, improving our menus to be less wasteful, sustainably sourced, seasonal, plant-forward, and culturally mindful.

To further Unity Health's work on sustainable menus, we have become a member of the Coolfood Pledge, committing to a goal to reduce the GHG emissions associated with our food offerings aligned with the Paris Climate Agreement. Each year, we track the quantities of food purchases by weight, including animal and plant-based proteins, which together contribute to 80 to 90 per cent of an organization's food-related GHG emissions<sup>3</sup>. The climate impact of food is then determined using the Coolfood Calculator. The analysis is conducted by World Resources Institute, and we receive an annual report detailing GHG emissions by food category, year-over-year trends, and comparisons.

3. The Cool Food Pledge. Coolfood. (2024, July 24). <https://coolfood.org/pledge/>.

# PRODUCTS AND SUPPLIES

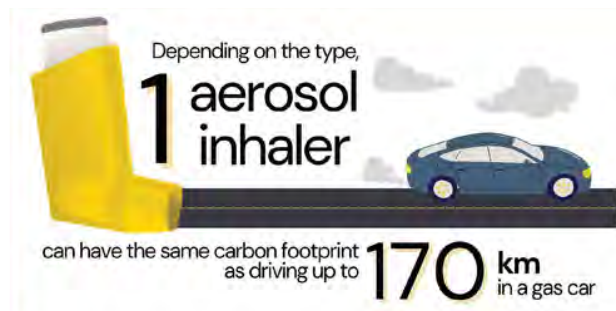
Unity Health is reducing the environmental impact of care by shifting to clinical products and supplies with a lower carbon and environmental footprint, and reducing waste.



**Figure 5.** Unity Health's Carbon Footprint of Anesthetic Gases Purchased 2020-23.

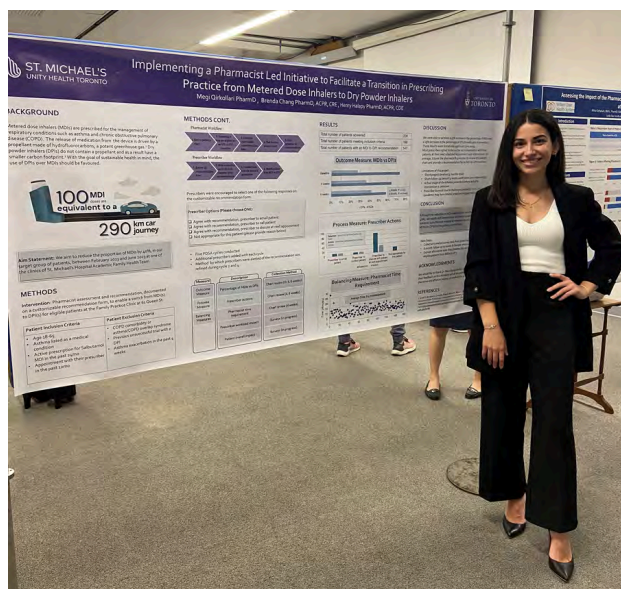
Anesthetic gases are potent GHG emissions, having hundreds to thousands of times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide.

Brandon Desrochers, the former Respiratory Therapy Clinical Lead Manager at St. Michael's, led a comprehensive assessment of the central nitrous oxide distribution system and preventive maintenance on all central medical gas distribution systems. Although efforts have led to a reduction in nitrous oxide usage, a considerable amount is still lost due to leaks. Efforts continue in the assessment of other strategies to reduce unnecessary nitrous oxide related emissions.



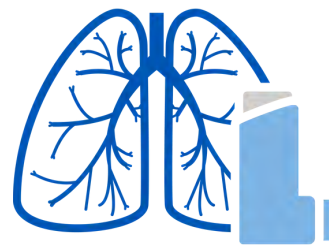
**Image 6.** Carbon footprint of metered-dose inhalers.

Inhalers are prescribed for the management of respiratory conditions, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Metered dose inhalers (MDIs) contain a propellant made of hydrofluorocarbons, which is a potent GHG, and thus, account for the greatest GHG emissions among all inhalers. Dry powder inhalers (DPIs) do not contain this propellant resulting in a smaller carbon footprint. Several initiatives have been led by Unity Health staff to improve patient care, decrease health care visits, and ultimately, reduce the associated environmental impact.



**Image 7.** Pharmacy Residency Night - Megi Qirkollari, Pharmacy Resident.

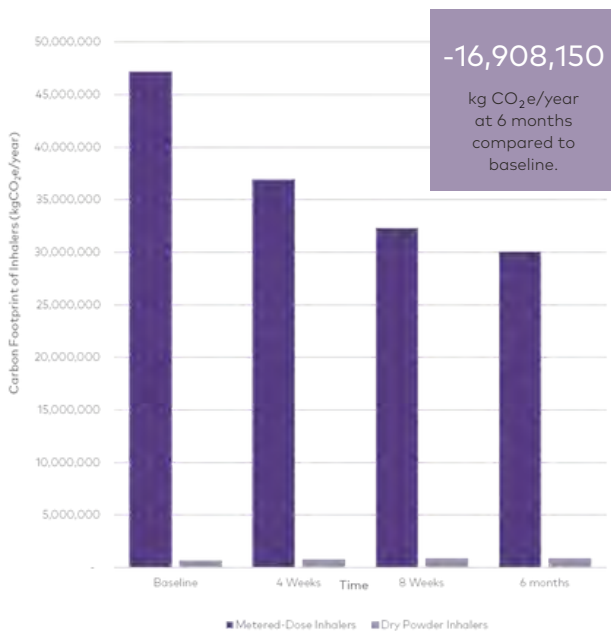
Megi Qirkollari (Pharmacy Resident) led a quality improvement project to enable a switch from MDIs to DPIs at the Family Practice Clinic at 61 Queen Street. Brenda Chang (St. Michael's Hospital Academic Family Health Team Clinical Pharmacist) reviewed patient charts to determine their eligibility to transition from MDI to DPI, and developed customized recommendations, which alerted their prescribers. At six months post-intervention, there was a 17% decrease in MDIs and 17% increase in DPIs, demonstrating the effectiveness of the pharmacist-led initiative in a primary care setting. We look forward to seeing this initiative scale to other Unity Health sites.



**Image 8.** Electronic Asthma Management System Image.

The Electronic Asthma Management System (eAMS) was developed with the leadership of Unity Health's Dr. Samir Gupta (Clinician Scientist and Respiriologist). The eAMS is a clinical decision support system that empowers patients to self-manage their asthma, improving their symptoms and helping them to avoid flare-ups and urgent health care visits.

In collaboration with patients, family doctors, asthma educators, and researchers at University of Toronto, including Unity Health team members Dr. Samantha Green (Family Physician), Ivy Lam (Clinical Pharmacist), and Dr. Andrew Kouri (Respiriologist), the system has now been enhanced to ensure that physicians are considering the environment when prescribing inhalers. With the help of a conversation aid, it empowers patients to take part in these treatment decisions. This technology is proven to significantly improve patient care in family practice clinics, and we look forward to now assessing its impact on the carbon footprint of the St. Michael's Hospital Academic Family Health Team.



**Figure 6.** Carbon Footprint Associated with Implementing a Pharmacist Led Initiative to Facilitate a Transition in Prescribing Practice from MDIs to DPIs<sup>4</sup>.

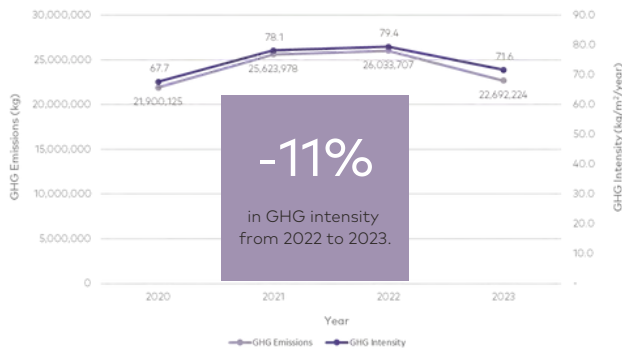
4. Assumption: average annual carbon footprint of most common MDIs and DPIs (brands and dosing) transitioned from and to. [https://view.publitas.com/5231e51e-4654-42c2-accd-b722e21f3093/inhaler-coverage-chart-references/page/1?\\_gl=1\\*pdpwmu\\*\\_ga\\*MjYxNTcyOTc4LjE2ODAyOTA5ODc\\*\\_ga\\_TRM5NF4JFC\\*MTcyMzA5Mzg3OS45NC4xLjE3MjMwOTM5MTQuMC4wLjA](https://view.publitas.com/5231e51e-4654-42c2-accd-b722e21f3093/inhaler-coverage-chart-references/page/1?_gl=1*pdpwmu*_ga*MjYxNTcyOTc4LjE2ODAyOTA5ODc*_ga_TRM5NF4JFC*MTcyMzA5Mzg3OS45NC4xLjE3MjMwOTM5MTQuMC4wLjA).

# Building

Unity Health has a rich history in integrating sustainability into facility operations and infrastructure.

## GHG EMISSIONS

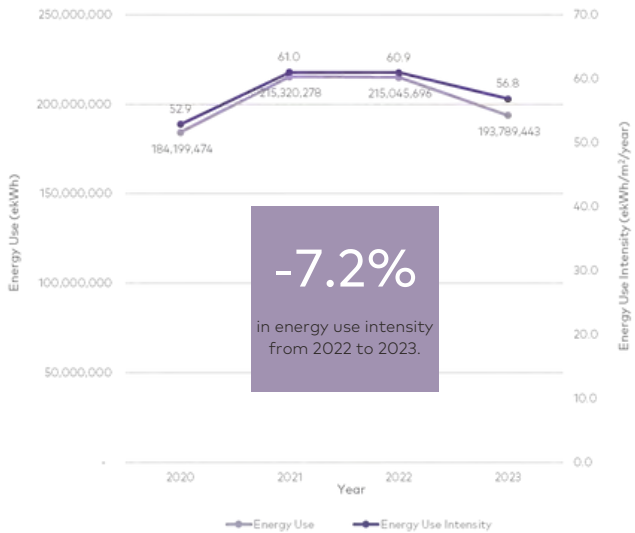
With the key targets outlined in our Sustainability Plan 2024-29, Unity Health has a strengthened commitment to reduce our GHG emissions from energy and operations.



**Figure 7.** Unity Health's Building GHG Emissions and GHG Intensity 2020-23.

Several large-scale redevelopment projects are in various stages across Unity Health, which we are leveraging as an opportunity to enhance sustainability and reduce GHG emissions. Some initiatives we have been working on this year include:

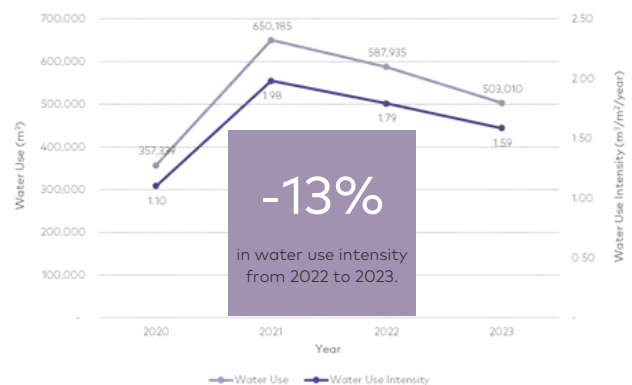
- Engaging with vendors to gather information and feedback in the development of a decarbonization project
- Defining guiding principles to help us set and meet sustainability targets
- Assessing low carbon heating and cooling alternatives



**Figure 8.** Unity Health's Building Energy Use and Energy Use Intensity (EUI) 2020-23.

## WATER

Unity Health is committed to minimize water consumption to reduce demand on natural resources and impact on our environment. This year, a repair was completed on the chilled water leak at St. Joseph's, which helped to reduce water consumption.



**Figure 9.** Unity Health's Water Use Intensity 2020-23.

# WASTE

Unity Health is working towards choosing materials and products to minimize waste and unnecessary chemicals however, providing the best care comes with some waste generation. Unity Health diverts as much waste as possible from the landfill through various recycling and composting programs.

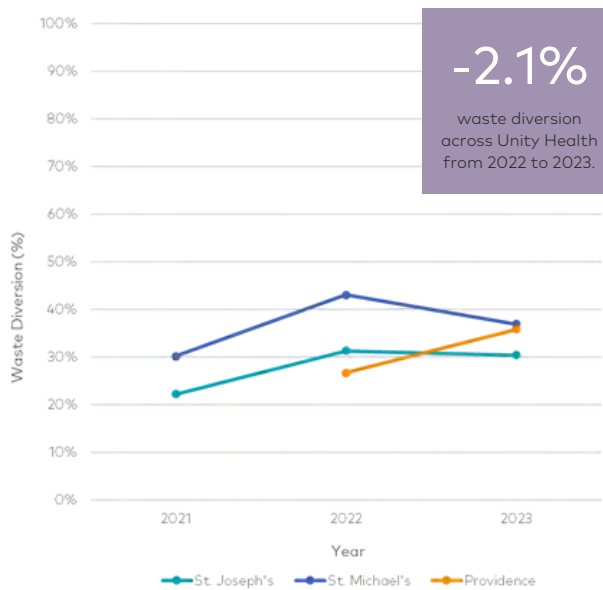


Figure 10. Unity Health's Waste Diversion Per Site 2020-23.

Amongst other existing waste diversion programs, such as St. Joseph's Community Garden composting, PVC 123 Recycling Program, and Stryker Sustainability single-use medical device recycling, we are proud to introduce two new waste diversion initiatives.

## Construction and Renovation Waste Diversion

A subcommittee of ESAC came together to reduce the amount of waste from construction and renovation projects being sent to landfill. Their first initiative focuses on creating a standard process that can be applied to all space modifications and renovations across the organization.



Image 9. Patients using wheelchairs at the Houses of Providence.

## Compassionate Equipment Recycling Program

Initiated in 2018 at St. Joseph's and recently updated to be an organization-wide initiative, this program aims to redistribute wheelchairs and walkers from the Houses of Providence by donating them to patients in need. Compassionate Equipment Recycling Program embodies sustainability by addressing social needs through improved patient care potentially reducing length of stay and meeting patient equipment needs, environmental needs by reducing waste, and financial needs by optimizing the use of existing resources.



# Path Forward

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Unity Health takes pride in providing high quality health care services and leading the way in sustainable health care practices. We recognize the interconnectedness between environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and the delivery of high quality health care services. Unity Health has a commitment to sustainability with the key targets set in our Sustainability Plan 2024-29.

While we have made significant strides this year, our work is ongoing. We remain dedicated to driving sustainable procurement internally and externally, and identifying key climate risks, developing management and mitigation strategies, and prioritizing adaptation initiatives.

We are committed to serve the greater good, caring for both the health and well-being of those we serve and the health of our planet to create a more sustainable, compassionate, and environmentally responsible future for generations to come. Join us as we continue to tackle Unity Health's carbon footprint and champion sustainability in health care.

For more information on sustainability at Unity Health:



[sustainability@unityhealth.to](mailto:sustainability@unityhealth.to)



<https://unityhealth.to/about-unity-health/accountability/sustainability/>

