

EIT Health “Climate and Health” Expert Focus Group

OUTCOME REPORT



Date: November 7, 2024

Location: EIT Health Germany-Switzerland, Munich

Participants: Experts from healthcare, pharma, medtech and academia

Moderator: Dr. Lisa Walter, EIT Health

INTRODUCTION

On 7 November 2024, EIT Health organised an expert focus group on "Climate and Health" in Munich. The event aimed to identify major challenges and opportunities at the intersection of climate change and healthcare. Experts from various sectors of the health ecosystem gathered to discuss priorities, synergies, and best practices, and to explore how EIT Health could support future climate and health projects and initiatives.

The event was structured into two sessions: a "practical" session with presentations on current projects, and a "theoretical" session featuring a moderated discussion on key issues and strategic directions.

1. Summary of Presentations

The presentations highlighted various approaches to promoting sustainable healthcare solutions:

- **Green AI** – Prof. Dr. Björn Eskofier, Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany
Eskofier introduced "Green AI" and the use of satellite data and energy-efficient AI applications to support climate analysis.
- **Energy Solutions for Hospitals – Decarbonisation without Compromise** – Julia Duna, Siemens AG, Germany
Duna discussed sustainable energy solutions for hospitals, focusing on decarbonisation, saving energy costs and reducing electricity consumption.
- **Importance of Partnerships for Accelerated Impact** – Alissa Monk, ten23health, Switzerland
Monk highlighted how partnerships and collaboration can accelerate sustainable initiatives, particularly for smaller companies.
- **Leveraging AI & Big Data to Enable Eco-Design within Pharma** – Kami Krista, Elio, Austria
Krista explained how AI and Big Data can support eco-friendly production processes at scale in the pharmaceutical industry.
- **From Production to Disposal: How Pharmaceuticals Become Green** – Benjamin Roth M. M., Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany
Roth discussed the regulatory challenges facing sustainable pharmaceuticals and introduced emerging "green" contracts as initial market incentives.
- **Towards Carbon-Neutral Care** – Prof. Dr. med. Dr. h. c. Jürgen Schüttler, University Hospital Erlangen, Germany
Schüttler presented sustainable healthcare strategies used in German hospitals, such as the efficient use of ventilation, climate-friendlier anaesthetics and improved waste management.

2. Discussion Outcomes

The moderated discussion focused on key challenges and solutions in the areas of healthcare system resilience, environmental sustainability, and international cooperation:

Healthcare System Resilience

What are the vulnerabilities of healthcare systems in the context of climate change?

- Participants highlighted gaps such as insufficient training and budget constraints that hinder climate preparedness.
- *Telemedicine* was identified as a key technology for reducing transportation needs and easing healthcare delivery.
- There is a lack of *incentives* for sustainable practices, especially in terms of reusing resources in hospitals and reducing medical waste.

Innovation for Climate-Resilient Health Infrastructure and the Pharmaceutical Industry

What innovations are needed to make healthcare more climate-resilient?

- *Regulatory Innovation*: Participants emphasised that sustainable manufacturing processes in the pharmaceutical industry require regulatory incentives. Simplifying the re-approval process for medicines in Europe would reduce environmental impact.
- *Patenting Sustainable Processes*: Although patenting sustainable manufacturing processes could incentivise innovation, Kami Krista noted that it might also hinder collaboration.

Policy and Governance

What policy interventions are needed to better integrate climate and health into national and global agendas?

- *Incentives and Funding*: Access to sustainable financing is crucial. Proposals included interest-free loans for green structures, long-term business models, and the use of consortium-based project funding as a “membership fee” in lieu of traditional funding models.
- *Government Support*: In addition to company self-funding, state programmes that support sustainable practices could play a major role.

Role of EIT Health

How can EIT Health support climate-resilient health strategies across Europe?

- *Impact Assessments:* EIT Health could provide a platform for measuring and assessing the impact of sustainable solutions and sharing results on a European level.
- *Standards Promotion:* Strengthening collaboration with European authorities, such as the EMA and DG SANTE, could advance the standardisation of sustainability processes across the EU.

Public Awareness and Education

How can healthcare professionals be better trained to recognise and respond to climate-related health issues, including mitigation and adaptation strategies regarding healthcare sustainability?

- *Continuous Training:* Participants suggested that healthcare professionals could be supported by AI-powered decision-making tools, as traditional training often does not suffice.
- *Climate Consultation Hours:* An example from Baden-Württemberg is the "Climate Consultation Hour," where patients receive information on climate topics. Such programmes help raise awareness and build competency in sustainable healthcare practices.

International Collaboration

What are the best practices for international cooperation on climate-related health issues?

- Participants noted that many companies take an "individual approach," which slows the integration of common standards.
- International collaboration should be streamlined to meet climate goals more effectively.

Ethical Considerations

How can we balance the positive health impact of a medication with the negative environmental effects of its production and disposal?

- A focus of the discussion was the waste of medicines and the need for *impact assessments* to identify which interventions are truly necessary and which have negative environmental consequences.
- Excluding individuals from necessary medication is viewed critically for ethical reasons - instead, *socio-ethical mechanisms* should be introduced at a political level to ensure that processes and products become sustainable for all.

3. Recommended Next Steps

- Continue regional and international collaborations alongside organising further roundtables and whitepapers on green healthcare to bring suggested solutions to the EU level.
- Promote innovation projects in sustainable healthcare through incentive programmes and financing options, such as interest-free loans and project-based funding models.
- Enhance training programmes for healthcare professionals to raise awareness and increase competency in addressing climate-related health risks and healthcare sustainability.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The focus group underscored the close link between climate change and health and the need for an interdisciplinary approach to implement sustainable solutions. EIT Health can play a central role in providing a neutral platform for collaboration, European visibility, training programmes, and funding for sustainable healthcare initiatives.

