

Southcoast Health pledges to cut emissions to net-zero

FALL RIVER, NEW BEDFORD and WAREHAM, Mass. – Southcoast Health announced today that the not-for-profit community health system has joined the Biden Administration in a pledge to decarbonize the healthcare sector. Signing this pledge, Southcoast has committed to meeting the climate goal of reducing emissions by 50 percent by 2030 and achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

Southcoast Health officials attended a White House virtual event on June 30, 2022 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and leaders from companies and organizations representing hospitals and health centers, as well as pharmaceutical companies, medical device-makers, suppliers and group purchasing organizations.

“We are proud to be a part of this initiative,” said Phil Oliveira, Vice President of Support Services at Southcoast Health. “Many of our programs are already working to enhance our facilities, making them resistant to climate change and supporting health equity and increased opportunities for underserved populations in our region. Signing this pledge reaffirms our commitment to the South Coast community and the patients we serve.”

The U.S. healthcare sector accounts for approximately 8.5 percent of domestic climate-warming emissions and in September 2021, 200 medical journals named climate change the number one threat to global public health. Millions of people living in the United States already experience associated harm –with disproportionate impacts on disadvantaged and underserved communities – through more frequent and intense periods of extreme heat, wildfires, flooding, vector-borne diseases and other factors that worsen chronic health conditions.

Addressing this challenge, Southcoast Health has already started adapting more environmentally conscious materials in its operations. Most recently, the system's Southcoast Cares Community Health and Wellness Program transitioned from a single diesel-powered Southcoast Wellness Van, to using two 2022 Kia Niro electric vehicles that will reduce the program's carbon footprint while providing greater access to more patients and locations per day.

"Public health decisions have to be based on the realities of climate change, and we all need to do more to make that happen at the national level," said ADM Rachel Levine, the Assistant Secretary for Health. "We're seeing right now what extreme temperatures and more severe storms can do to human health, environmental quality and our physical infrastructure. It's great to see so many different companies and organizations come together to decarbonize and become partners in protecting human health from climate change. Today's announcement is just the beginning of a longer ongoing effort with partners from across the medical sector, which is exactly the kind of big response we need as a country."

The Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE), part of HHS under the Assistant Secretary for Health, developed the health sector climate pledge in conjunction with the White House to help focus industry response to climate change. In addition to reducing their carbon footprint, signatories also commit to producing detailed plans to build climate resilience for their facilities and the communities they serve.

For more information, please see the White House fact sheet linked **here**.