



Cost-Management & Green Sustainability

ANALYSIS - EVALUATION - OPPORTUNITIES - KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Lisa Ward

Making Hospitals More Hospitable

Héctor González Jiménez, Ali Haidar

The Transformative Role of AI in Healthcare: From Clinical Breakthroughs to Sustainability Goals

José A. Cano

Reimagining Tomorrow's Hospitals: How to Reduce the Carbon Fingerprint to Achieve Harmony Between Health and Sustainability

Cristina Galindo

Recruiting for Sustainability: Building a Resilient Healthcare Workforce

Maria Beatriz Piñeiro-Lago

Leading the Global Climate Challenge: Galician Health Service as a Climate Champion



Recruiting for Sustainability: Building a Resilient Healthcare Workforce

Sustainable recruitment in healthcare is vital for workforce stability, cost-efficiency and environmental responsibility. As the sector faces shortages, burnout and high turnover, hiring for sustainability integrates green healthcare, ethical employment and future-proof skills. New roles, career pathways and training programmes support this shift, ensuring resilience. Healthcare leaders must adopt sustainable workforce strategies to balance financial, social and environmental priorities.

CRISTINA
GALINDO



Director | Sustainability Talent | London, UK

key points

- Sustainable hiring ensures workforce stability, cost-efficiency and environmental responsibility.
- New roles in healthcare integrate green skills, ethical hiring and digital innovation.
- Career pathways and training are crucial for sustainability professionals' development.
- AI and technology improve recruitment but require ethical oversight to prevent bias.
- Workforce strategies must address ageing staff, burnout and global healthcare shortages.

As healthcare systems worldwide face increasing financial pressures, environmental challenges and workforce shortages, the need for sustainable people strategies and the incorporation of sustainability into business strategy and operations has never been more urgent.

Recruiting for sustainability requires a strategic approach to hiring and retaining healthcare professionals in a way that keeps up with the competitive landscape, ensuring long-term workforce stability, cost-efficiency, environmental responsibility and high-quality patient care. It goes beyond traditional recruitment by integrating new sustainability skills, green healthcare initiatives and ethical employment practices.

This concept is particularly relevant to a sector where workforce shortages, burnout and high turnover rates are especially high, thus potentially compromising patient outcomes and long-term financial sustainability. It's not only about building future-proof organisations with highly demanded sustainability skills but also about implementing sustainable recruitment strategies that ensure healthcare organisations attract, train and retain talent while promoting environmental, social and economic responsibility.

This article explores the new types of sustainability roles in the industry, the skills and training required, the opportunities and challenges facing healthcare leaders to remain competitive in a fast-moving environment and the sustainability of the workforce itself.

Aligning Profit with Planet and Long-Term Value

According to the World Economic Forum (2024), the global healthcare market is worth €8.67 trillion (\$9 trillion) and, as of 2024, makes up 11% of the world's GDP. It has, therefore, a significant impact on people and the planet worldwide. The sector isn't immune to global challenges affecting other industries, including increasing disruptions in supply chains, workforce shortages, financial constraints and, of course, climate change. The rate at which we are collectively using natural resources is depleting the Earth and putting pressure on planetary boundaries, six out of nine of which we have already surpassed. Irresponsibly continuing at this pace can have unintended but irreversible consequences.

Sustainability is here to stay. Against a backdrop of political pressures in many countries and the ongoing duel between profit and the planet, there is no turning back. Not just because it is the right thing to do and because we simply cannot keep consuming at this rate, but because it makes business sense. Yes, sometimes sustainable decisions can be more expensive in the short term, but they always pay off in the long term. More often, though, these decisions can lead to significant cost savings from day one, for example, through energy-efficient technologies, waste reduction programmes, sustainable supply chains and effective people policies. Profit and the planet don't have to be enemies.

Sustainability Careers

The companies in life sciences, pharma and healthcare that are making progress in their sustainability commitments and engaging in sustainability strategies are not merely box-ticking. They are making sustainability a core part of their purpose, strategy and business operations. But how is sustainability shaping the need for new roles in the industry?

It might sound very niche; however, there is a wide range of roles requiring a diverse set of skills across functions and at different levels of seniority. Some are of a more generalist nature and are likely to have counterparts in other industries, such as chief sustainability officers, environmental, social and governance (ESG) directors, social impact leaders, sustainability reporting analysts, diversity & inclusion leads, regulatory compliance managers, circular economy heads or human rights experts.

There is also a wave of green jobs, more technical in nature and revolving around main environmental pillars: energy, waste, air quality and water. These roles are key in the design and management of hospitals, clinics and medical centres, as well as in the handling of industry-specific products, including highly hazardous materials. Many of these roles allow transferable skills to be acquired from other industries, especially those dealing with the management of any type of building, factory or even agricultural installation. Roles in these areas include recycling & waste manager, energy efficiency and renewable energy expert, environmental

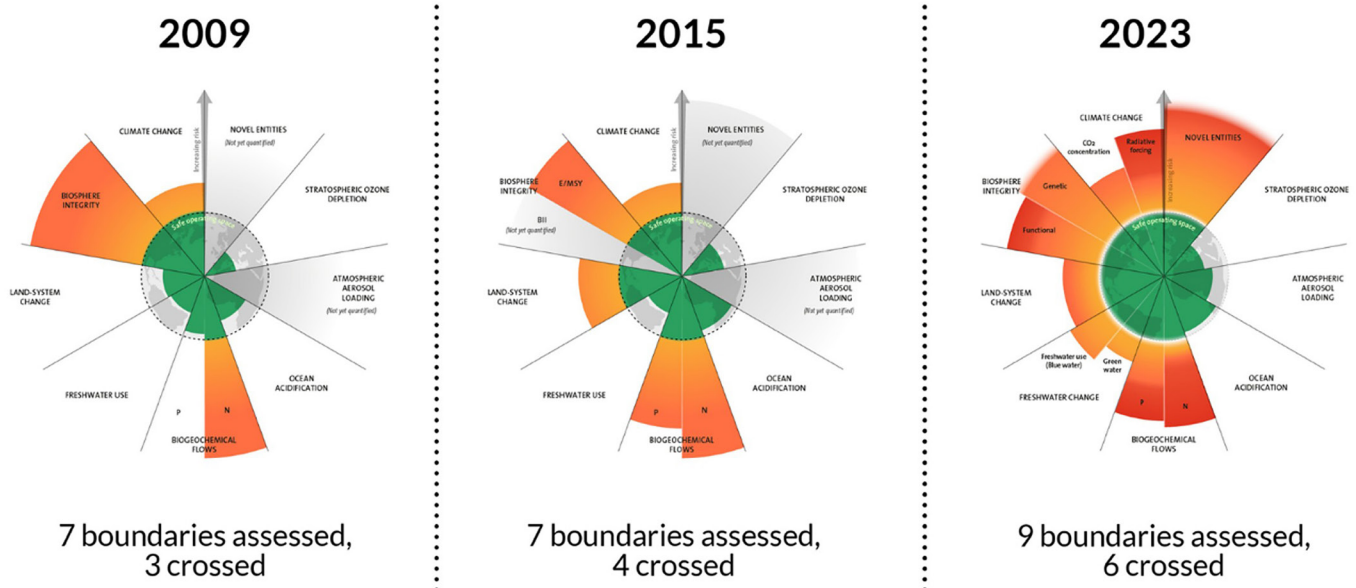


Figure 1. The evolution of the planetary boundaries framework. Source: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University (Stockholm Resilience Centre n. d.)



public health practitioner, estates manager, indoor environmental quality specialist or water conservation expert.

Other jobs have made their way into the healthcare sector by combining innovation, artificial intelligence

very technical needs or temporary support during peak periods. The assignments they work on might range from a few days, providing expert advice as part of a larger project, to a couple of weeks or months designing a sustainability strategy or covering temporary staff absences.

“Recruiting for sustainability requires a strategic approach to hiring and retaining healthcare professionals.”

and digital skills leading to disruptive solutions in areas such as telemedicine, digital health or robotics. Some of these roles are completely new and are continuously evolving with technological advances accelerating the creation and delivery of more innovative and sustainable solutions.

Case Study: Sarah de Lagarde, The Bionic Woman

Sarah de Lagarde’s life turned upside down following a London tube accident costing her part of her leg and an arm. After nine frustrating months with a basic prosthetic, her life changed again when she received an advanced AI-powered bionic arm able to learn her movements and anticipate her intent by detecting muscle signals. She is now able to perform delicate tasks again, allowing us to envision a future where robotic dexterity can significantly enhance the lives of people with disabilities, the elderly and others in need.

Case Study: Eniix

Eniix is a Chilean start-up providing healthcare services to patients in over 350 medical centres across seven countries in Europe and Latin America. A combination of challenges, including a shortage of physicians and specialists, a high patient no-show rate and deficiencies in customer support channels resulting in a dehumanised service experience for patients, led to the creation of a cloud-based solution. Their virtual assistant, named “Patricia”, has helped reduce no-show rates by 50% and achieved 98% satisfaction with outpatient care experiences whilst providing centralised management of infrastructure, guaranteeing optimal time management.

The rapid growth of the demand for sustainability experts, driven in great part by regulatory requirements, has also created opportunities for consultants and freelancers. Driven by purpose and more flexibility in their work, seasoned professionals with a combination of healthcare and sustainability expertise are setting up their own businesses and helping organisations with

What all these jobs have in common is that they attract people who want to have a positive impact and who care about the planet and about other people. A passion that can’t be trained and often money can’t buy.

Career Development

For those interested in pursuing careers in sustainability, it can be difficult to know where to start or what to expect in terms of career development in comparison to traditional functions.

Forward-thinking larger organisations are now able to offer “career pathways” in sustainability and provide a comprehensive curriculum from early careers to senior management, just as in any other industry.

Case Study: UK’s National Health Service

The National Health Service (NHS) in the UK has developed the NHS Estates Sustainability Career Pathways, providing a framework to support staff development and help achieve ambitious net zero targets for core emission by 2040. This goal positions the NHS to become the world’s first national health service to reach such a milestone. These career pathways include information on the skills, experience and qualifications needed to work in the department, along with examples of current employees and their journeys into these roles (NHS England 2023).

At the same time, sustainability allows for unique careers: many people currently working in this area have previously worked in other industries and were able to transition into sustainability roles by leveraging their transferable skills and prior experience.

Case Study: Sam’s Journey

Sam studied law and started their career as a junior lawyer at a large professional services firm. Passionate about social justice, they volunteered for many years at an international NGO supporting vulnerable women.

Following a career break, they returned to the corporate world and now work as Corporate Social Responsibility Manager for a large healthcare manufacturer.

Sustainability Skills

Sustainability professionals face great challenges because they are caught up between the science warning about climate change, the public demands for businesses and governments to tackle these challenges, and those parts of society calling for a dial-back on ESG considerations. It is no surprise that resilience, perseverance, influence (often without authority), creative problem-solving, change management and collaboration rank high amongst the skills required for roles in sustainability. This is an area where so-called power skills (otherwise known as soft skills) are almost as important as technical skills and easily transferable from other sectors.

Technical skills remain inevitably central in a constantly developing profession. As organisations further develop or enter the world of sustainability, setting their net-zero targets and strategies, demand for professionals with solid experience increases. This has been particularly acute in the areas of decarbonisation, carbon accounting and carbon offsets. As new regulations come into place, professionals are increasingly expected to be well-versed in implementing the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSD) and other sector-specific regulatory

requirements. Whilst organisations would welcome candidates with decades of experience, the reality is that some of these areas have only emerged recently.

The amount of competencies relevant to sustainability can be overwhelming. To equip professionals with a framework to further develop their skills, the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals has designed to help professionals assess their sustainability skills at all stages in their careers (IEMA n. d.).

Executives interested in transitioning into sustainability roles are turning to highly regarded organisations such as the Cambridge Institute of Sustainability Leadership (CISL, cisl.cam.ac.uk) and its Business Sustainability Programme to acquire a solid foundation that can be further cemented with more in-depth courses on a particular sector or area of sustainability such as circular economy, supply chain, human rights or sustainable finance. Organisations serious about investing in sustainability literacy for their sustainability professionals are increasingly partnering with world-class education institutions to develop in-house or cobranded solutions.

As sustainability professionals become more educated in environmental, social and economic considerations, they become better equipped to craft effective strategies. Both the challenges and opportunities related to sustainability are continuously evolving with technological advancements, regulatory changes and shifting societal expectations. Staying abreast of these through continuous professional development and accreditation will allow professionals to remain effective, relevant and compliant.

Executive boards also need to keep up with developments in the sustainability space and equip themselves to lead confidently on climate action to support their businesses through the net-zero transition. Whether it's due diligence, green procurement, sustainable finance or people-related issues, ESG-related topics are now an integral part of boardroom discussions.

Training the Wider Workforce

Whilst the emphasis on increasing sustainability literacy among those professionals responsible for designing and executing strategies has become an essential pillar of progress, the complexity of the current sustainability challenges requires an understanding that goes beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries.

However, the need for sustainability literacy extends past specialised roles within the sustainability department. To truly advance against sustainability goals, it is crucial to extend this knowledge to a much



Figure 2. IEMA's Sustainability Skills Map. Source: © The Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals, 2025



broader audience: achieving company sustainability goals requires involvement from everyone at all levels in the organisation.

Ultimately, sustainability involves business transformation and will infiltrate practically every position. Professionals will be expected to make sustainable choices and operate in the most sustainable

out of the box. This is what led Victoria Tomlison, who had herself already stepped down from a long corporate career, to set up Next-Up (next-up.com). This organisation is committed to 'retiring the word retirement' by challenging how individuals and businesses think about careers for those over 50 through their Rethink Retirement platform.

“Profit and the planet don't have to be enemies.”

way available. This might not automatically mean it will be a viable option in the short term but a goal to work towards. For example, replacing medical equipment with cutting-edge technology can lead to reduced emissions and shorter treatment times while also being accessible to everyone. This could be an ideal solution to many sustainability challenges, but it may be something an organisation might be unable to implement in the short term.

Upskilling & Retraining

We are all living longer and will have to extend our working lives. Careers used to be linear, but now they are 'squiggly', and career breaks are increasingly becoming normal. However, organisations are not adapting to these changes. A key aspect most are ignoring is the upskilling of their own staff, in particular older staff. These are generations who have reinvented themselves through multiple transformations and learned to operate in the digital age with tools no one could have even imagined at the time they joined the workforce. Employees who have been out of the corporate world for a longer period of time on a career break have often acquired new skills and are highly motivated to rejoin the workforce. Granted, they might need some support to get back up to speed, so a number of companies have developed Career Returner programmes.

Case Study: Nurses' Return to Practice

Nurses play a key role in the healthcare sector. However, the shortage of these very much needed professionals is a well-documented problem. Through the Return to Practice (RTP) programme, the UK's National Health Service (NHS) have pledged to boost the NHS's workforce with 50,000 more nurses and 25 universities across England now offer RTP nursing and midwifery courses.

Resolving the challenges of an ageing population and how they can contribute to society requires thinking

These strategies can, of course, help retain experienced senior professionals you have invested in over the years. Additionally, they can open new career paths for new talent interested in retraining for sustainability roles bringing a wealth of transferable skills from their previous roles and industries.

Sustainability Talent

In a fast-evolving and competitive market, where can healthcare organisations find the best talent to identify those sweet spots marrying purpose and profitability? What is the profile of those who are able to design strategies that give the company a competitive advantage, comply with all regulations and do the right thing for people and the planet?

The demand for sustainability talent is high and is expected to grow as the function develops. The regulatory framework keeps becoming more complex every year, technology evolves fast, and companies that truly position sustainability as a competitive advantage are reaping the benefits. Professionals who started early in the industry, obtained sustainability qualifications and have accumulated years of experience are well-placed to choose where to work. In fact, in some cases, candidates are approached to join a competitor not even having completed 18 months in a new role. These candidates have an advantage and can make choices about their careers. While many are eager to accept the challenge of guiding a company in the sustainability journey, they will be as quick to leave an employer who lacks genuine commitment to sustainability.

One of the organisations pioneering these developments in the sustainability space is Birdeo (birdeo.com), a boutique executive search firm based in Paris that has operated exclusively in the sustainability space since 2010. A B Corp company since 2015, it has evolved in parallel with its clients and candidates and understands the market's needs well.

Over the past few years, many other mainstream search firms have launched ESG or sustainability departments in an effort to meet the evolving recruitment needs of their clients. Understandably, many organisations don't exactly know what they are looking for. Given that they are investing in the search process, they might as well ask for as much as possible.

a focus on data protection, has also reduced email traffic, as candidates' data is now hosted on recruitment platforms that are regularly updated. A substantial number of interviews, at least at the early stages of the recruitment process, are held virtually—a practice that would have seemed unthinkable just a few years ago.

“Recruiting for sustainability is no longer an option – it is a necessity.”

However, these candidate profiles are ‘unicorns’: they are expected to have decades of experience in sustainability as well as industry expertise. They should be senior enough to deal with the boardroom but able to roll up their sleeves and manage a variety of tasks. This is especially important as they may have little or no dedicated resources and hence depend on their influencing and negotiation skills to secure support from other departments.

Consultants and freelancers are another growing segment of professionals to support the sustainability transformation. Some organisations, especially those smaller in size, simply can't afford a full-time resource. Sometimes, the need is very specific for a particular challenge in the supply chain, choice of material or building design. These professionals have the additional advantage of seeing similar projects from different industries or even across companies within the same sector, so they can bring best practices to design solutions to these challenges. This expertise would be more difficult to source from within the company itself.

The new sustainability roles also open new avenues for executives in transition—mid-career professionals who, after years in operations, marketing, communications or human resources, want to dedicate the next phase of their careers to a purpose-driven role. These positions align more closely with their values, allowing them to contribute to a larger cause. Sustainability roles and healthcare can certainly provide this path.

Considerations for a Sustainable Recruitment Process

Whilst piles of printed CVs might be a thing of the past, companies have numerous opportunities to make their recruitment process more sustainable, both environmentally and socially. Technology, along with

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is helping reduce costs and speed up the hiring process. However, progress has still to be made regarding carbon footprint reduction in recruitment. The rapid growth of AI technologies is fuelling the demand for data centres, which in turn require more energy to operate and water for cooling. For example, in Uruguay, Google admitted that its proposed data centre would require 7.6 million litres of water per day, which is equivalent to the daily water consumption of 55,000 people.

While AI-driven recruitment platforms aim to streamline the hiring process by analysing candidate applications and using predictive analytics to identify the best candidates, there is a concerning side effect: potential unconscious bias. Several minority groups have reported being automatically and systematically rejected by Application Tracking Systems (ATS).

Given the high recruiting and training costs, sustainable hiring models must prioritise cost-effective and long-term workforce investments. Addressing these challenges requires innovative workforce planning and retention strategies.

Global migration of healthcare workers raises important ethical and human rights issues, especially when professionals are recruited from countries that experience workforce shortages and where healthcare workers may be in vulnerable situations.

The Sustainability of the Workforce

The healthcare industry is also impacted by global workforce trends, including an ageing population, five generations coexisting in the workplace, an increase in burnout and mental health challenges, and newer generations pushing for better work-life balance and jobs with purpose.



The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates a projected shortfall of 11 million healthcare workers globally by 2030, with low-and middle-income countries facing the most severe shortages (WHO, 2024). At the same time, healthcare workforce turnover rates are rising, with studies indicating that replacing a nurse can cost hospitals between €42,991 (\$45,100) and €64,343 (\$67,500), factoring in recruitment, training and lost productivity. Alarmingly less than half (41.7%) of hospitals track this cost (NSI Nursing Solutions 2024).

What can healthcare organisations do to raise to these challenges?

In addition to some of the strategies mentioned in this article to attract and retain talent, some thinking outside the box will be required.

Hiring for Skills, not CVs

Pioneering companies are also exploring new ways to identify talent without using traditional CVs. Arctic Shores's (arcticshores.com) skills-based hiring uses tasks instead of questions, a method that can be particularly helpful when hiring for early careers, volume hiring and hard-to-fill roles.

Age Inclusion Strategy

A key factor that many organisations are currently overlooking is the development of a strategy to accommodate an ageing workforce. Employees who wish to remain in the workforce longer may not be able (and don't want to) work in the same way they did in their 30s. "If you don't have an age strategy, you don't have a growth strategy", says Lyndsey Simpson from 55 Redefined (55redefined.co), an organisation dedicated to helping employers engage, retain and attract older workers in a way that benefits everyone.

Human Resources Policies

Another important focus area is the modernisation of human resources policies and processes to become an employer of choice. Social enterprise "From Babies With Love" published an annual Cutting Edge Parental and Family Leave Guide. This guide includes best practice case studies from a variety of industries that demonstrate how to support employees during different key phases of their lives.

Diversity and inclusion policies and practices help in addressing systemic biases by ensuring equitable opportunities for all staff members. For healthcare professionals, an inclusive workplace fosters a sense of belonging and respect, which is crucial for job satisfaction and employee retention.

Wellbeing

Healthcare employees often face high levels of stress, burnout and other mental health challenges due to the demanding nature of their work. Addressing these issues in order to "take care of those who take care of us" is a priority that can't be reinforced enough. Key strategies for supporting employee mental health include:

- building a culture of psychological safety,
- enabling access to mental health services,
- reducing stigma associated with mental health,
- mental health awareness training,
- education on coping mechanisms and workplace adjustments.

Healthcare organisations that prioritise sustainability and incorporate it in recruitment and human resources management will be better positioned to address future workforce challenges, reduce costs and enhance patient outcomes. By embracing AI, digital transformation, green hospital initiatives and ethical workforce planning, healthcare leaders can build a system that is not only financially and operationally stable but also environmentally and socially responsible.

Recruiting for sustainability is no longer an option – it is a necessity for ensuring that healthcare institutions remain resilient, adaptable and capable of meeting the demands of a rapidly evolving industry.

Conflict of Interest

The author works for Birdeo as a freelancer and has a small crowdfunded investment in 55 Redefined.

references

IEMA (n. d.) Sustainability Skills Map and Membership Standards (accessed: 13 February 2025). Available from iema.net/sustainability-skills-map

NHS England (2023) Green career pathways: NHS estates and facilities (accessed: 13 February 2025). Available from england.nhs.uk/long-read/nhs-estates-sustainability-career-pathways/#green-career-pathways-nhs-estates-and-facilities

NSI Nursing Solutions (2024) 2024 NSI National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report (accessed: 18 February 2025). Available from nsinursingsolutions.com/Documents/Library/NSI_National_Health_Care_Retention_Report.pdf

Stockholm Resilience Centre (n. d.) Planetary boundaries (accessed: 13 February 2025). Available from stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html

World Economic Forum (2024) How data-driven digital healthcare tools cut costs and boost outcomes. World Economic Forum, 4 January (accessed: 18 February 2025). Available from [weforum.org/impact/how-digital-healthcare-tools-cut-costs-boost-outcomes](https://www.weforum.org/impact/how-digital-healthcare-tools-cut-costs-boost-outcomes)

World Health Organisation (2024) Health workforce (accessed: 18 February 2025). Available from [who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1)



HealthManagement
Promoting Management and Leadership