

Healthcare changes can slash climate impact: global health agency

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Global healthcare has a significant impact on the environment but there are ways it could slash its greenhouse gas emissions without increasing production costs, the international health agency Unitaaid said Tuesday.

Unitaid, which works on ensuring equitable access to medical innovations, looked at the production chain in 10 key healthcare products, such as malaria and HIV medicines.

It found that emissions could realistically be reduced by 70 percent by 2030—more than half of that reduction without increasing [production costs](#).

The findings were released ahead of the COP28 UN climate summit in Dubai, which runs from Thursday until December 12—and, for the first time, includes a day focused on the climate and health, on December 3.

Unitaid wants to advance health products that are less harmful to the environment, more resilient, and better adapted to climate and environmental risks.

The agency's results director Vincent Bretin said [climate change](#) was putting [health systems](#) under greater stress, but the [health sector](#) itself was also contributing to [greenhouse gas emissions](#), and its supply chains producing significant waste.

A Unitaid report looked at how the global healthcare system could reduce carbon emissions and mitigate its impact on nature.

"As the source of 4.6 percent of global emissions, health value chains contribute significantly to climate change," the report said.

Of the sector's emissions, health product supply chains account for more than 70 percent.

Supply chains

For each of the 10 health products examined, Unitaid looked at climate

impacts including raw material acquisition, waste, [carbon emissions](#) and plastic pollution.

The report found these 10 supply chains emitted more than 3.5 million tonnes of carbon per year.

It said producing the [active pharmaceutical ingredients](#) in medication could be highly energy-intensive.

The report said emissions could be slashed through recycling solvents, process efficiency, redesigning products and switching to renewable energy.

It said there was often one high carbon part of manufacturing medicines that could be targeted for reduction.

"We've identified 20 main technical solutions that could reduce emissions by 70 percent, including 40 percent that could be implemented without increasing the cost of production," Bretin said.

Going further and tackling the remaining 30 percent, however, "would increase product costs", said the report.

Unitaid said it would present its findings at COP28 and use them to shape its investments.

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