



Interior Health

Embed and Spread:

Mobilizing Knowledge of Environmental Sustainability Initiatives in Healthcare

August 2025

Prepared by: Yunfei Li, UBC Sustainability Scholar, 2025

Prepared for:

Amanda McKenzie, Environmental Sustainability Manager

Ozora Amin-Lee, Environmental Sustainability Coordinator

Infrastructure and Support Services
Interior Health

Health and well-being for all

Quality | Integrity | Compassion | Safety

Disclaimer

This report was produced as part of the UBC Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between the University of British Columbia and various local governments and organisations in support of providing graduate students with opportunities to do applied research on projects that advance sustainability and climate action across the region.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of Interior Health staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report and any errors are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Interior Health or the University of British Columbia.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges that the UBC Point Grey campus in Vancouver where the project work is conducted is situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) First Nation.

Additionally, the author working with Interior Health, would like to recognize and acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Dākelh Dené, Ktunaxa, Nlaka'pamux, Secwépemc, St'át'imc, Syilx, and Tsilhqot'in Nations where we live, learn, collaborate and work together.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following individuals for their invaluable support and feedback throughout this project: Ozora Amin-Lee (Interior Health), Amanda McKenzie (Interior Health), Chirstine Henderson (Interior Health), Mehrnaz Soleimanpour Makuei (Interior Health), and Karen Taylor (University of British Columbia).

Executive Summary

Interior Health (IH) is dedicated to supporting the health and wellbeing of everyone in the British Columbia (B.C.) Interior. IH has outlined a series of actions in their strategic document [Climate Change and Sustainability Roadmap 2023-2028](#) to advance sustainability across the organization. One of the key actions is expanding the Sustainability Engagement Program (SEP), which was originally launched in 2021, to engage and empower IH staff to promote sustainability in their workplaces across the organization.

As IH is halfway through the timeline of the Climate Change and Sustainability Roadmap, the current project aims to evaluate the SEP and provide recommendations for its development and expansion. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected through an online survey and semi-structured interviews with SEP participants, to learn about the staff engagement experience and identify the strengths of SEP as well as areas of improvement.

Key findings reveal the ongoing cultural shift to embedding sustainability in IH, enablers and barriers for engagement and action, and participants' expectation for the SEP. While participants demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation, they still faced practical challenges such as limited time and resources as well as insufficient leadership support in their engagement with sustainability work.

In response to these findings and participants' expectations for SEP, four knowledge translation products were developed: a waste and recycling guide, a toolkit for a specific scalable project, a communication tool to foster awareness and discussion, and a comprehensive hub for sustainability resources. These products aim to accelerate the “embed and spread” of sustainable culture and best practices across IH, supporting the organization's long-term climate and sustainability goals.

Contents

Background	1
Interior Health.....	1
Commitment to Addressing Climate Change & Sustainability.....	1
Environmental Scan	2
Methods.....	4
Results Summary	5
Knowledge Translation Product Development	6
Product 1: Interior Health Waste and Recycling Guide	6
Product 2: Project Toolkit for Standard Bed Make-up	6
Product 3: Sustainability Moments Handouts.....	7
Product 4: Sustainability 101	7
References	8

Background

Interior Health

Interior Health (IH) is committed to working collaboratively to improve the quality of life, health, and well-being of people in the southern British Columbia (B.C.) Interior. IH envisions a health-care system that equitably contributes to the well-being of our populations, staff, and communities, and to the sustainability of our planet. IH serves a population of approximately 899,500 in the southern B.C. Interior, across 59 municipalities, 54 First Nation communities and 14 Métis Chartered Communities [1].

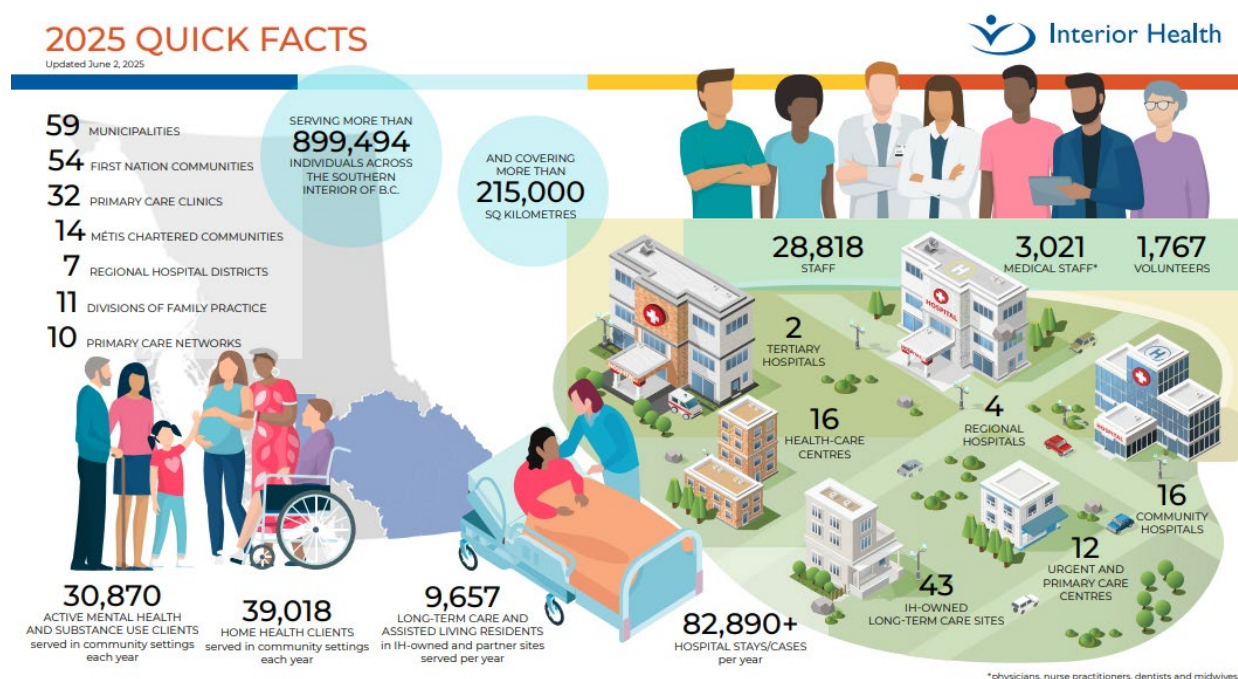


Fig.1 Interior Health Quick Facts [2]

Commitment to Addressing Climate Change & Sustainability

As identified by the 2024-2027 strategic priorities, IH is committed to 'addressing climate change and sustainability'. The Strategic Priorities are aligned with IH's [Climate Change and Sustainability Roadmap 2023-2028](#). The Roadmap is a five-year plan, which has identified 20 key actions to increase resilience to future climate disruptions [3].

One of the key actions identified as a focus for IH is to 'Expand the Sustainability Engagement Program (SEP).'

The SEP first launched in 2021, aims to engage IH staff on initiatives to “green” operations and deepen their understanding of environmental sustainability, climate risk and resilience within healthcare. This program has two primary objectives:

- To inform and educate IH staff on the importance, and benefits of embedding sustainability within their work areas through training, educational opportunities, support for sustainability projects
- To influence a culture of sustainability, where all staff are empowered to contribute to improving IH's climate change and sustainability roadmap

Key components of the SEP include the operation of site-specific or region-based Environment Sustainability (ES) Committees, a monthly newsletter, and the development of the Climate Change Accountability Report and implementing region-wide special initiatives. Participation in the SEP has steadily grown in the past four years. To better empower local staff to drive cultural change and implement projects with positive environmental benefits [4], the SEP is primarily focused on nine ES Committees, which are led by 14 Champions and have a total of 71 Advocates. IH is assessing the SEP to effectively guide its future development and expansion. Through the *Embed and Spread: Mobilizing knowledge of environmental sustainability initiatives in healthcare* project IH aims to: 1) review and evaluate the SEP to gain a comprehensive understanding of staff perspectives on the SEP, and 2) develop practical knowledge translation products to facilitate effective sustainability engagement across IH.

Environmental Scan

A cross-organizational review of sustainability engagement practices was conducted to summarize key initiatives, implementation models, and lessons learned that IH's SEP can draw on for future expansion. The review combined document analysis with expert interviews, examining sustainability strategies and practices across multiple health organizations and private sector enterprises [5-11], and included three semi-structured interviews with engagement leads from health organizations across B.C.

Core strengths and strategies identified from the environmental scan highlighted the following aspects. First, effective programs usually adopt a multi-level engagement structure. They offer **wide involvement opportunities** with open-access resources, events, newsletters, and accessible online hubs. Further and deeper engagement is achieved through **leadership programs** with practical support, including orientation sessions, project templates, data tracking tools, small funding pools, and personalized mentorship to empowers staff to initiate and deliver sustainability projects effectively. Second, **visibility and storytelling** always play a vital role in sustaining interest, with successful project stories shared frequently through conferences, awards, and internal communications. **Active support from managers and leaders** is also pivotal to long-term success as it helps secure resources and foster a culture of sustainability. Though healthcare sector usually

works with constraints in time and resources, creativity and passion from staff can make grassroot ideas thrive, while sharing and cross-learning can further scale up impacts.

Private sector sustainability engagement practices also provide valuable insights.

Value alignment and recognition is particularly emphasized. Common approaches include embedding sustainability into corporate purpose and mission, integrating sustainability KPIs into employees' performance reviews, and designing incentive or recognition programs to encourage sustainability innovation. **Visibility and storytelling** are also key drivers of sustainability engagement and actions. Frequent internal communications, visual reminders, and external reviews and reporting are always in place to create a highly immersive culture of sustainability.

Methods

To comprehensively evaluate the SEP, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. This included both a staff survey and a series of semi-structured interviews. The survey provided broad insights into participants' beliefs, engagement levels, and perceived enablers and barriers, while the interviews offered deeper, qualitative narratives about their personal experiences in the Program. Together, the two complementary methods have generated a more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of how the SEP is perceived by participants, how it operates in practice, and what opportunities exist for improvement.

The project went through an ethics review using the ethical screening tool developed by Alberta Research Ethics Community Consensus Initiative (ARECCI) process [12] and yielded minimal risk results. A survey containing both close-ended and open-ended questions was developed on IH's REDCap survey platform to gather staff perceptions and engagement experiences about sustainability in general and specifically about the SEP. The survey was distributed to all current participants of SEP, in total 107 recipients, including the members of ES Committees as well as passively engaged staff who subscribe to the email newsletters. Response collection period was from May 30 to June 15, 2025. Descriptive statistics were analyzed and summarized.

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, mainly probing into the respondent's experience of SEP and implementing sustainable initiatives. Thematic analysis [13] was adopted to analyze the interview data.

Results Summary

A total of 29 valid survey responses were collected via REDCap, along with 11 semi-structured interviews conducted with staff participating in the Sustainability Engagement Program (SEP) across multiple Interior Health (IH) sites. The results of the quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data was separately analysed. Then a triangulation of findings from both sources was made to generate insights to strengthen IH's future sustainability engagement and related actions. These insights informed the development of four knowledge translation products to facilitate embedding and spreading sustainability further within IH.

To protect the confidentiality of employees' personal and IH's organizational information, the full results are not publicly available. Here is a summary of key findings. Survey and interview results show an ongoing cultural shift of embedding sustainability in IH, with multiple enablers and barriers for engagement and action identified, both at personal level and systemic level. Participants generally demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation and dedication to drive sustainability at their sites. However, they still faced practical challenges, such as limited time and resources. They also expressed expectations for the SEP, including more cross-site sharing, access to handy toolkits and knowledge hubs, and more responsive support as per their needs.

Knowledge Translation Product Development

According to the feedback from SEP participants through the survey and interviews during the evaluation process, directions and contents for knowledge translation products were identified in consultation with the Regional Environmental Sustainability Team. Four products were finally developed in various formats. In consideration of IH organizational information safety and confidentiality, the knowledge translation products are not publicly available. But a high-level summary is provided as follows.

Product 1: Interior Health Waste and Recycling Guide

Waste and recycling are the most salient sustainability-related topic in daily operations and frequently participated initiatives. One of the key areas of interest for SEP members was to better understand recycling at their site, as there is, confusion about waste management and recycling practices that exist across IH facilities, and limited documented resource and education available, we partnered with the Waste Management Lead to address these concerns. The first knowledge translation product is a comprehensive guide on waste and recycling that applies to all IH-owned facilities, including detailed categorization of general waste streams (garbage, and recycling), clarification on recyclability of certain items, standardized signages for waste stations and waste bins, etc.

Product 2: Project Toolkit for Standard Bed Make-up

Standard bed make-up is an exemplar sustainability project – coming with multiple benefits yet requiring cross-department collaboration, and potentially scalable to all IH sites. Based on the experience and documents available from IH Laundry Lead, a project toolkit package was developed, in which targeted resources are included for different roles for this project. Step-by-step details on project initiation, preparation, implementation, and monitoring are documented in the toolkit, with pitching decks available to get leadership support and communicate with clinicians.

The standard bed make-up toolkit can serve as a handy resource for site ES Committees who would like to pick up a project but do not know where to start. It can also be one of the “collective action” that IH can proceed as a region, to standardize bed make-up across all the sites. This toolkit will also serve as a template to document and spread sustainability projects of high scalability across IH.

Product 3: Sustainability Moments Handouts

To embed sustainability into organizational culture, sustainability must be more salient, more frequently mentioned on all occasions. Drawing on experience from fostering a culture of safety, “Sustainability Moments” are designed for short briefing and discussions on sustainability integrated into every meeting at all levels in IH. A series of themed one-page handouts is developed to raise awareness, trigger discussion and reflection, and provide learning resources for general staff.

Product 4: Sustainability 101

The last product is a one-stop resource hub related to sustainability and taking action. It is an internal webpage to inform and educate IH staff (both clinical and non-clinical) on the importance and benefits of embedding sustainability within their work through training, educational opportunities, and support for sustainability projects. This page could also influence a culture of sustainability, where all staff are empowered to contribute to sustainability initiatives.

The Sustainability 101 page incorporates multiple pillars:

- Basic and foundations on climate change & sustainability in healthcare *(summary of existing resources, leading to internal and external courses, webinars and training opportunities)*
- Internal resources for leading sustainability projects
 - *Project library (newly developed, including a full repository of all ongoing and completed projects in all site-level ES Committees, scalable projects will be highlighted with toolkits/ how-to guides)*
 - *Environmental impact calculator*
- External resources *(summary of existing resources, leading to useful public pages and contents)*

References

- [1] Interior Health. *Our story* [Internet]. Interior Health. Available from: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/about-ih/our-story>
- [2] Interior Health. *Interior Health 2025 quick facts* [PDF]. Interior Health; 2025. Available from: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/PDFS/ih-quick-facts.pdf>
- [3] Interior Health. *Climate change accountability report 2024* [PDF]. Interior Health; 2024. Available from: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/PDFS/climate-change-accountability-report.pdf>
- [4] Interior Health. *Climate change and sustainability roadmap 2023–2028* [PDF]. Interior Health; 2023. Available from: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/PDFS/interior-health-climate-change-sustainability-roadmap-2023-2028.pdf>
- [5] Green Care. *Green+Leaders 2024 annual report* [PDF]. Green Care; 2025 Apr. Available from: <https://bcgreencare.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/GreenLeaders-2024-Annual-Report.pdf.pdf>
- [6] Island Health. *Climate change and planetary health strategy – full report* [PDF]. Island Health; 2025 Jan. Available from: https://www.islandhealth.ca/sites/default/files/sustainability/documents/ISLH-climate-strategy-full_report_jan2025.pdf
- [7] Green Care. *Green Care* [Internet]. Green Care; [cited 2025 Aug 6]. Available from: <https://bcgreencare.ca/>
- [8] Island Health. *Environmental sustainability* [Internet]. Island Health; [cited 2025 Aug 6]. Available from: <https://www.islandhealth.ca/about-us/accountability/strategic-direction/environmental-sustainability>
- [9] University Health Network. *Greening UHN* [Internet]. UHN; [cited 2025 Aug 6]. Available from: https://www.uhn.ca/corporate/AboutUHN/Greening_UHN
- [10] Schneider Electric. *Sustainability* [Internet]. Schneider Electric; [cited 2025 Aug 6]. Available from: <https://www.se.com/ww/en/about-us/sustainability/>
- [11] Unilever. *Sustainability* [Internet]. Unilever; [cited 2025 Aug 6]. Available from: <https://www.unilever.com/sustainability/unilever.com>
- [12] Alberta Innovates. *ARECCI ethics screening tool* [Online tool]. Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions; 2010. Available from: <https://arecci.albertainnovates.ca/ethics-screening-tool>
- [13] Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 2006;3(2):77-101. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>