

Summer 2025 Sustainability Scholars Program Internship Opportunity

The UBC Sustainability Hub is pleased to offer current UBC graduate students the opportunity to work on sustainability internship projects. Successful candidates work under the guidance of a mentor from the partner organization, and are immersed in real world learning where they can apply their research skills and contribute to advancing sustainability across the region. The pay rate for the summer 2025 program is \$31.25/hour or \$7,812.50 for a 250-hour project.

- Visit the [Sustainability Scholars Program website](#) to learn [how the program works](#) and to [apply](#).
- Be sure to review the application guide on the Apply page to confirm your eligibility before applying.

Applications close at 11:59 pm on Sunday January 26, 2025.

Project title: Research to understand the carbon emissions avoided through virtual mental health care

Project Background & Overview:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual care expanded quickly to maintain patient care while in-person visits were restricted. Surveys of patients receiving this care through Providence Health Care's Mental Health Program showed a high level of satisfaction with virtual care services, and even when restrictions on in-person visits ended, the Mental Health Program's Brief Intervention Clinic (BIC) and Reproductive Psychiatry Clinic continued to offer virtual care options.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, just 3.5% of all visits to these clinics were virtual. Between April and December of 2020, this number grew to 88%. Although virtual visits have slightly declined since then, 84% of all visits were virtual between January 2021 and November 2023. This continued reliance on virtual care not only supports sustainable healthcare delivery by reducing transportation emissions but also improves access to mental health services for individuals who may face barriers to in-person visits. As we look to the future, integrating virtual care as a permanent option will be key to enhancing patient care, accessibility, and sustainability.

Project description

The aim of this project is to estimate the climate impact of virtual care compared with the climate impact of in-person visits from patients accessing care at two mental health outpatient clinics located at St. Paul's Hospital.

The Mental Health Program conducted a preliminary cross-sectional study using electronic health records that included all patients with a virtual care encounter between November 1, 2019, and December 31, 2020. We used postal code data from administrative databases to estimate the total travel distance avoided and the travel-related carbon dioxide emissions avoided for virtual care visits during the study period.

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This proposed project involves expanding on the initial study to include all the data collected from January 2021 up to November 2023. Using the methods of the preliminary study as the foundation, the Sustainability Scholar would use postal code data to calculate the travel and associated emissions that patients avoided as a result of using virtual care instead of in-person care. This period is especially salient because it reflects a period when offering or attending virtual versus in-person visits was a real choice available to practitioners and patient.

Coupled with patient satisfaction data, this work will help make a climate-based case for continuing or even expanding virtual care for certain populations needing mental health care. It will inform policy and practice within the Mental Health Program but, when more widely published, may also influence other health authorities' practices or government policy by highlighting the benefits of virtual care.

Project scope

Literature review of peer-reviewed and grey literature to understand the carbon emissions resulting from virtual health care and mental health services.

Data extraction and analysis:

- Based on a provided dataset consisting of anonymized patient encounters and postal codes.
 - Estimate the round-trip travel distances avoided as a result of patients using virtual care instead of attending in-person clinic visits using GIS/Google Maps.
 - Using the distances avoided, along with an existing estimated breakdown of how people are likely to travel (for example, via personal car, transit, active transport, etc.) and the documented estimated carbon emissions for each mode of transport, calculate the carbon emissions saved.

Deliverables

- A final report containing a summary of the work completed
- A final report for the online public-facing [Scholars Project Library](#).
- A presentation for the Providence Health Care Mental Health Program's quarterly Research Education Series

Time Commitment

- This project will take 250 hours to complete
- This project must be completed between May 1 to August 15.
- The Scholar is to complete their hours between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday, approximately 17 to 20 hours per week.
- The Sustainability Scholar will attend a bi-weekly 1-hour meeting with a member of the research team to receive support as needed and to give a brief update on the project progress

Required/preferred Skills and Background

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- ☒ Excellent research and writing skills
- ☒ Statistical analysis
- ☒ Strong analytical skills
- ☒ Ability to work independently
- ☒ GIS training or experience.
- ☒ Familiarity with benchmarking methods and tools
- ☒ Experience with health services and strong independent work ethic

Additional project requirements

The Scholar will be asked to complete Providence Health Care's confidentially course.

Applications close at **11:59 pm Sunday January 26, 2025**

Apply here: [Click here to apply](#)

Contact Karen Taylor at sustainability.scholars@ubc.ca if you have questions

Useful Resources

We are holding a special **resume preparation workshop for prospective Scholars** on January 21, 2025.

[Click here for details and to register.](#)

Below are some links to useful resources to help you with your resume and cover letter (there are many more online). Some of these resources also provide information on preparing for your interview.

<https://students.ubc.ca/career/career-resources/resumes-cover-letters-curricula-vitae>

<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/graduate-pathways-success>

<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/cover-letter-cv-resume-templates-ubc-career-services>