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Health Care Without Harm Calls for Climate Action at Launch of HHS Health Care Resilience Initiative

Joins Health Care Leaders at White House Event to Commit to Building a Climate Resilient Health System

[Washington, DC] – At a senior-level White House event today, Health Care Without Harm and health executives from across the country called for an increased commitment from the health sector to take the significant and measurable actions that the mitigation of climate change demands.

Moderated by Counselor to the President John Podesta, the meeting today signaled the launch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Sustainable and Climate Resilient Health Care Facilities Initiative. As part of President Obama’s Climate Action Plan, the Initiative will produce tools and information to help health care facilities prepare for the impacts of climate change and increase their resilience.

HHS recognizes climate change as one of the top public health challenges of our time. The National Climate Assessment confirms that changes in climate threaten human health and well-being in many ways, including through impacts from extreme weather events, wildfire, and decreased air quality; that some of these health impacts are already underway in the United States; and that climate change will amplify some of the existing health threats the nation now faces in the future.

Acknowledging their obligation and opportunity to minimize the health impacts of climate change, health systems from across the country are already making significant progress to enhance the resiliency of their facilities and communities. Several health systems participating in the White House event are members of the Health Care Climate Council, a leadership network of hospitals committed to strengthening the health sector’s response to climate change.

“Making the transition to climate-resilient hospitals is preventative medicine for American society,” said Gary Cohen, co-founder and president of Health Care Without Harm. “With the launch of this new
initiative and with leadership already seen within the sector, health care institutions must capitalize on this momentum and work to embed resilience and environmental sustainability into our national health care model.”

Today, as part of the new HHS initiative, the Administration also released a guide for health care providers, design professionals, and policymakers to promote continuity of care before, during, and after extreme weather events.

Co-authored by Robin Guenther, FAIA, LEED Fellow, and senior advisor to Health Care Without Harm, *Primary Protection: Enhancing Health Care Resilience for a Changing Climate* is the first tool that brings together case studies from hospitals, nursing homes, and other residential health care facilities that have experienced or sustained damage from extreme weather events, and gathers together their collective responses into a set of emerging best practices.

“A hospital’s climate resilience may be only as strong as the community in which it resides,” said Ms. Guenther. “This guide allows people to see the whole picture of why hospitals fail in cold weather, in hot weather, in storms, in tornados as well as understand what similar facilities have done to become more resilient.”

“Climate change represents a significant health risk for a large segment of the global population going forward,” said Ms. Guenther. “These best practices in resilient health care infrastructure have universal application around the globe. Sharing them will enable health providers worldwide to continue delivering needed services during and after a significant weather event in their community.”

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About today’s White House meeting, Health Care Climate Council members had this to say:

**Dignity Health:** “Our organization incorporates environmental policies into the work we do every day,” said Vice President of Community Health, Sister Susan Vickers. “Whether its designing efficient buildings, conserving water, reducing waste, or lowering our greenhouse gas emissions, Dignity Health is making sure that we are conscious of both our own impact on the environment, and its impact on us.”

**Gundersen Health System:** "We didn’t set out to become the greenest healthcare system in the country. We targeted and achieved a goal of energy independence using conservation and locally-produced power and heat,” said Jeff Thompson, MD, CEO of Gundersen Health System. “In addition we decreased our food waste by over 75% and markedly increased our local food sources. Our pharmaceutical waste stream has decreased over 70%. Our system, and the communities we serve, is more economically-sound and more resilient in times of financial and climate stress.”

**Partners HealthCare:** “Partners HealthCare congratulates the White House on the release of the Healthcare Resilience guide,” said John Messervy, AIA, Corporate Director of Design and Construction. “Recognizing that extreme weather events are occurring more frequently and that we must be available to provide for the health needs of our communities during these times, Partners HealthCare committed in 2008 to the development of its first purpose-built resilient healthcare facility, Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital. Partners is also at the forefront of addressing a root cause of climate change
Through its commitment to reduce energy consumption by 25% by 2015. As of October 2014, Partners has reduced consumption by 21% since 2009.

**ThedaCare:** “ThedaCare acknowledges the importance of assessing our climate change vulnerability and resiliency status,” said Paul Linzmeyer, Sustainability Leader. “Furthermore, we understand as part of our mission to improve the health of our communities, we need to lead the discussion on climate change impacts and start driving mitigation and adaptation strategies needed to get meaningful climate change outcomes. We joined the HCWH Climate Change Council because of the importance of having this national effort become coordinated with local and regional efforts.”

**University Hospitals:** “University Hospitals is committed to enhancing Northeast Ohio’s climate resilience through our preparedness to meet our communities’ health needs as they are impacted by climate change related events; and our ongoing efforts to increase our operating efficiency and support our local economy,” said Michael Anderson, MD, Chief Medical Officer, University Hospitals.

**Virginia Mason Health System:** “Our organization is honored to take part in this conversation about one of the most important issues of our time,” said Brenna Davis, Director of Sustainability. “We have a responsibility to do everything possible to slow the effects of global warming, protect our planet’s future and safeguard the health of our communities. There are significant opportunities for hospitals and health systems to make a lasting difference for current and future generations.”

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**About Health Care Without Harm**
Health Care Without Harm ([https://noharm.org/](https://noharm.org/)) works to transform the health sector worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it becomes ecologically sustainable and a leading advocate for environmental health and justice.

**About the Health Care Climate Council**
Established by Health Care Without Harm, the Health Care Climate Council ([https://noharm-uscanada.org/healthcareclimatecouncil](https://noharm-uscanada.org/healthcareclimatecouncil)) is a leadership network of hospitals committed to strengthening the health sector’s response to climate change.