

Environmental Sustainability Report

2021 - 2022





Acknowledgement of Country

UnitingCare acknowledges that we live and work on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Countries. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Australia's First Nations Peoples have cared for Country for over 60,000 years, and have long recognised the interdependency of ecological, spiritual and human health. We acknowledge and respect this deep relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their ancestral lands and seas. We recognise this custodianship and the contribution our First Nations Peoples continue to make to conservation, climate action and the management of lands and waters.

We commit to learn from, work with and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge of caring for Country, to build a brighter, greener future together.

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Message from the CEO and Director of Mission

UnitingCare is committed to prioritising planetary health; we see this as core to our mission of enabling “life in all its fullness” [John 10:10] for the people we serve; now and in the future.

In this second 12-month reporting period of our Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025, we are proud to share our progress in reducing environmental impact while extending social impact.

Several industry-leading initiatives were delivered over the 2021-22 reporting period, including a successful electric vehicle trial, ‘closed loop’ hospital plastics recycling program, and hosting a national sustainable healthcare conference.

We achieved strong momentum in the areas of Built Environment, Transport, and Leadership, while maintaining success within Purchasing. However, we recognise the need to boost efforts in the areas of Waste and Empowered People, where the level of employee engagement required to progress these initiatives has continued to be impacted COVID-19 restrictions and significant workforce pressures.

During the next 12 months, we will increase our focus on reducing waste, growing and empowering our network of staff Green Champions, and taking steps towards meeting our 100% renewable electricity target through continued rooftop solar roll-out and evaluating renewable energy purchasing strategies.

We hope you are as inspired as we are by the passion and resolve of UnitingCare’s people, which is evident in what they have delivered to advance our 2025 environmental sustainability goals.



Craig Barke
CEO, UnitingCare



Rev Bruce Moore
Director of Mission,
UnitingCare

Who we are

UnitingCare, as an agency of the Uniting Church in Australia, has the great privilege of delivering health, aged care, disability and community services to thousands of people a day throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Continuing the legacy left by the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches community services that united in the early 1900s around their shared mission; our purpose remains to extend UnitingCare's reach and services to people who need our support most.

Now, as one of Australia's largest charity organisations, we remain grounded in the beliefs of UnitingCare's founders – that everyone deserves the chance to live their best possible life. This inspires us every day to change people's lives for the better, through more than 460 locations including hospitals, residential aged care facilities, retirement living and family and disability services.



Proudly representing



17,000 employees



9,600 volunteers



460 locations supporting more than 600,000* people



1.5 million volunteer hours



Four private hospitals



10 Lifeline Crisis Line contact centres



127 Lifeline retail stores



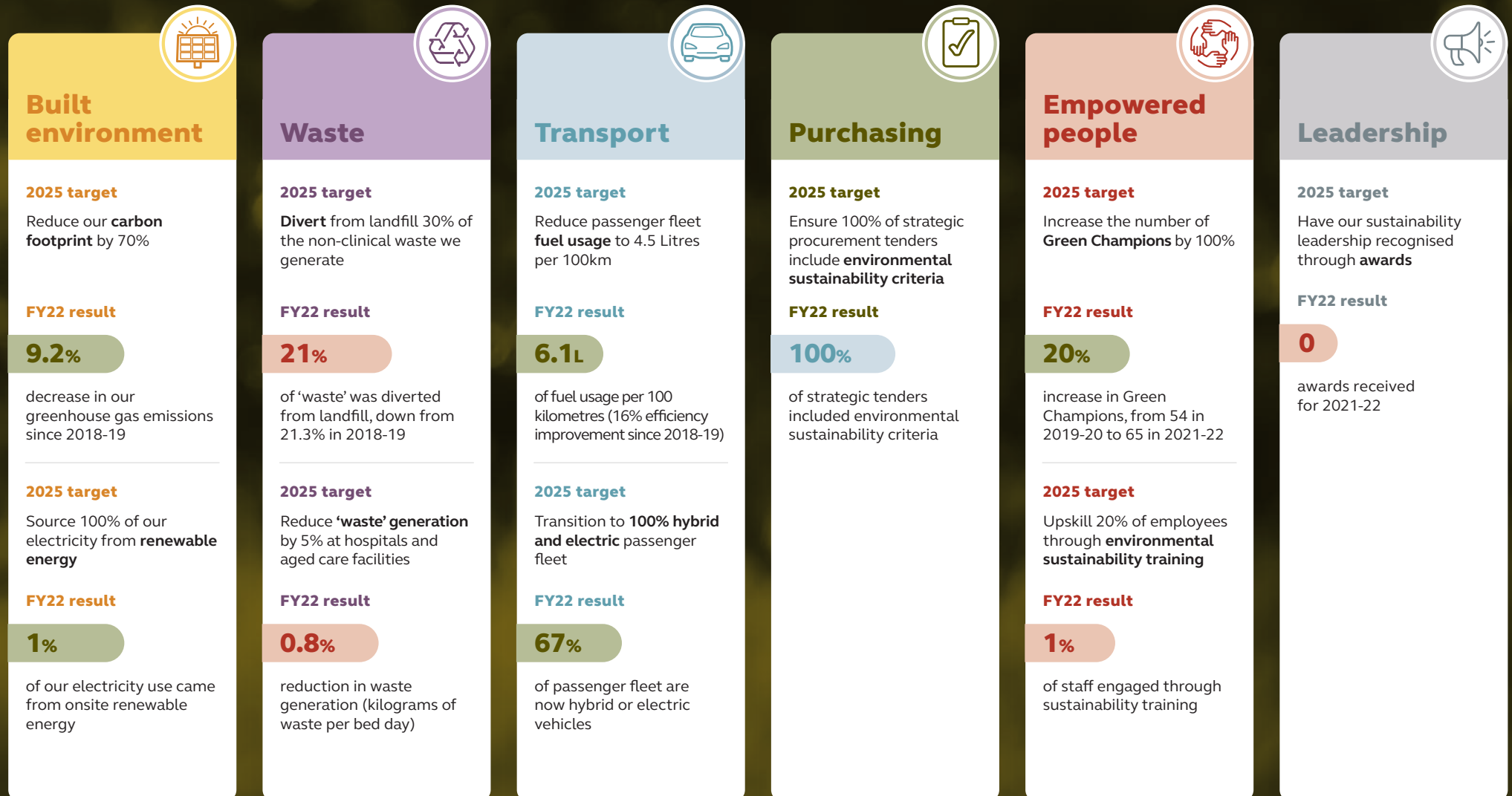
56 residential aged care facilities

* The number of people supported by our Aged Care and Community Services, Family and Disability Services, plus the number of people admitted to our hospitals

Our 2021 - 2022 scorecard

Here we share highlights of our actions and progress in the second period of our *Environmental Sustainability Strategy* journey — 2021 - 2022.

■ Achieved
■ On track for target date
■ Off track for target date





Built environment

Objective

Transition to greener, healthier buildings that reduce our demand for energy, water and resources.

2025 Targets

70%

Reduce our carbon footprint by 70%

100%

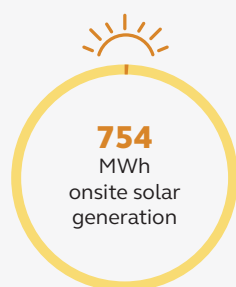
Source 100% of our electricity from renewable energy



Rev. Bruce Moore, Simone Elias and Judene Andrews of the UnitingCare Mission Team at the RACQ Solar warehouse.

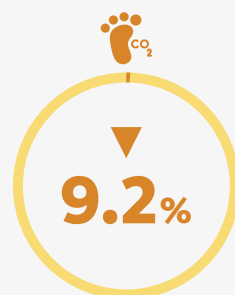
Our progress in 2021-22

Renewable energy

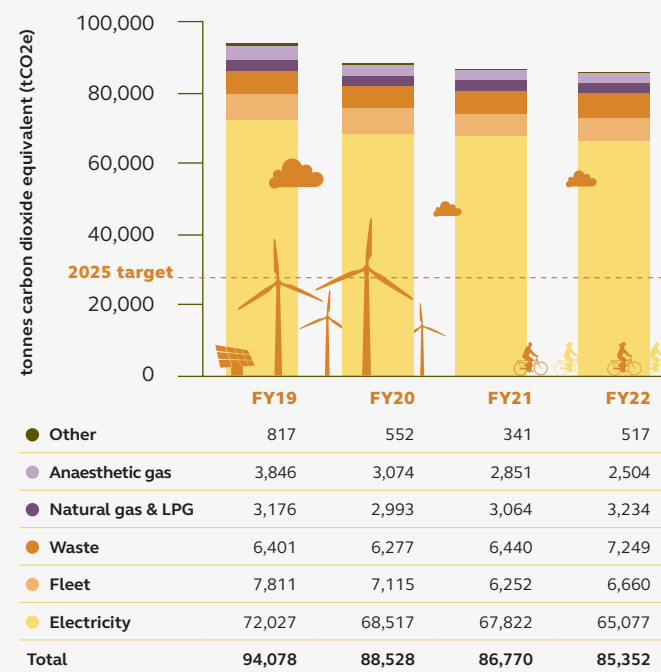


Reported **onsite renewable energy** generation increased to 1% of total consumption, up from 0.8% in 2020-21. This increase is largely due to more accurate reporting at twelve sites (311 kW) that are currently impacted with remote solar monitoring outages.

Carbon footprint¹



Carbon footprint **reduced by 9.2%** compared to our 2018-19 baseline, continuing a year-on-year downwards trend since 2016-17. Electricity continues to be our greatest source of emissions reduction, while reducing waste-to-landfill is a priority improvement area.



Built environment



Commenced a **major roll-out of rooftop solar** in May 2022, installing 18% of the project's planned 2.4 megawatts at two Blue Care aged care facilities; the remaining sites will be completed in 2022-23.



Completed a two-year **climate change adaptation research project**, funded by the Qld Department of Environment and Science, and delivered in partnership with the University of Sunshine Coast and Griffith University. This project delivered a model aged care facility Heat Mitigation Adaptation Plan and supporting toolkit on 'green infrastructure'—like trees, water features and shade sails—and its impact on residents' health and wellbeing during extreme heat events.



Embedded sustainability clauses in UnitingCare's standard tenant lease agreement, including separate metering for energy and water, provision of commingle recycling service, and requirement for cleaning contract to comply with recycling programs.



Waste

Objective

Implement waste management practices that reduce waste generation, increase recycling and support the transition to a circular economy.

2025 Targets

30% 

Divert from landfill 30% of the non-clinical waste we generate

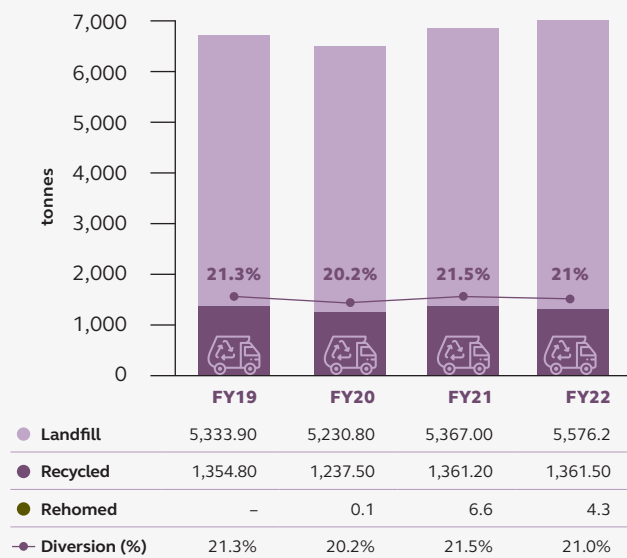
5%

Reduce waste generation by 5% at hospitals and aged care facilities



Our progress in 2021-22

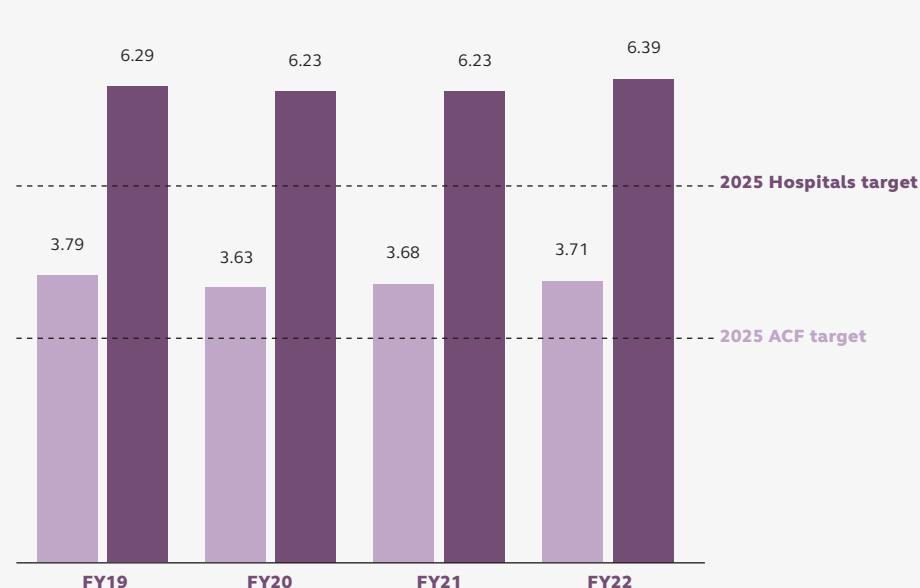
Waste tonnage² & diversion³



21%

Diversion decreased to 21% (compared to 21.5% last year), due to an anomalous increase in waste-to-landfill in our Family & Disability Services. However – and despite continued increases in non-recyclable PPE use – UnitingCare Hospitals and Blue Care saw improvements in diversion rates.

Waste intensity⁴ (kg per bed day)



▼2.1% ACFs ▲1.6% Hospitals

Waste intensity (kg per bed day) at our aged care facilities increased marginally in the last twelve months; however, this still represents a 2.1% improvement against pre-COVID-19 levels. Hospitals, on the other hand, saw a 1.6% increase in waste intensity against the 2018-19 baseline.



Introduced **food organics** recycling at The Wesley Hospital; this helped divert an extra 19 tonnes (2% of the hospital's total waste footprint) from landfill in 2021-22.



Digitised BlueCare's new employee starter pack, avoiding approximately 90,000 sheets of printed paper per year.



When it came time to replace gym mats at St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital, the existing mats were donated to Brisbane State High School's rowing sheds, which were impacted by the 2022 floods.



Waste

Our progress in 2021-22

Australian-first recycling program

The global waste crisis has highlighted that simply recycling is not enough to curb planetary harm; organisations must move to circular solutions that ‘close the loop’ on resource recovery.

In 2022, St Andrew’s War Memorial Hospital established a new compliant closed-loop recycling system thanks to a partnership with Queensland’s CircMed. Officially launching in July 2022 following a nine-month trial, the program is now diverting more than 450 kilograms of plastic healthcare waste each week. The closed loop program has expanded the range of items that the hospital diverts, now including disposable curtains, pressed plastics, soft plastics and packaging. These are transported to a CircMed facility in Brisbane, where they are sorted, shredded and granulated.

Through the partnership, St Andrew’s and CircMed are working towards the plastic ‘waste’ being created into new resources that can be purchased back by St Andrew’s, such as rubbish bags, water jugs and cups (this next phase of the innovative model is still in its infancy).

Susan Farlow, Hotel Services Manager at St Andrew’s said this of the program:

“ The key to success is sorting waste correctly when disposing. We have recycling champions in every corner of our hospital and our teams are incredibly passionate about ensuring the correct items go into the correct bin. ”



Watch this video to hear from some of our passionate hospital staff behind this initiative →



Waste



Transport

Objective

Reduce our contribution to air pollution and emissions through improved fuel efficiency and reduced travel.

2025 Targets

4.5L

Reduce passenger fleet fuel usage to 4.5 litres per 100 km

100%

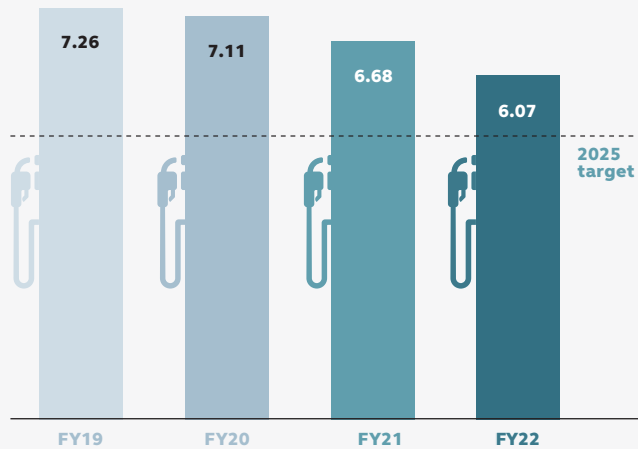
Transition to 100% hybrid and electric passenger fleet



Electric vehicle charging at Blue Care's Caloundra Community Care, one of the pilot sites for the EV trial.

Our progress in 2021-22

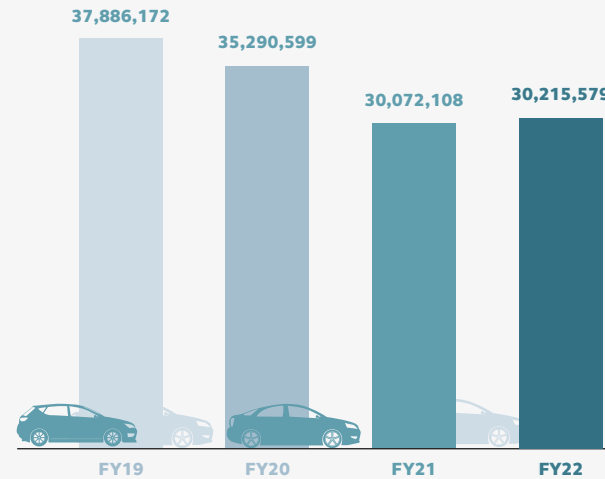
Fleet fuel efficiency (L per 100 km)



67% hybrid + electric

Added **254 new hybrid** and **8 electric vehicles** (replacing internal combustion engine vehicles), which now make up **67%** of our passenger fleet.

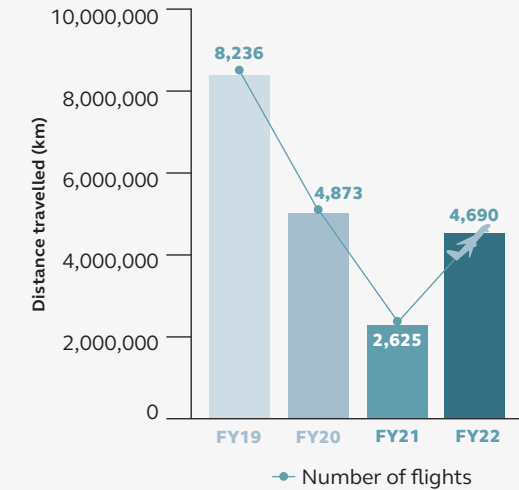
Fleet travel (km)



▼17%

Travel-related emissions have decreased by 17% since 2018-19, driven by significant improvements in UnitingCare's **vehicle fuel efficiency** and a step-wise reduction in road mileage. Despite these operational improvements, 2021-22 saw an increase in travel-related emissions compared to the previous year's record low. This is mainly due to an Australia-wide increase in fuel emissions intensity, reflecting the higher proportion of imported fuel now being sold in Australia.

Air travel



2,065 more flights

As pandemic-related travel restrictions eased, UnitingCare staff increased **air travel**. However, this still represents a 43% reduction on 2019-20, in line with UnitingCare's internal corporate travel policy which targets a 30% reduction in travel and travel-related expenses.



Our progress in 2021-22

Fleet of the future

“ *UnitingCare has the largest hybrid fleet in Queensland, and we are committed to continually shrinking the environmental footprint of our fleet. Introducing electric vehicles goes a long way to helping us achieve our goal.* ”
Fleet Operations Manager, Mark Stephens

UnitingCare's vehicle fleet is an essential part of our business, with 1,611 vehicles helping us to connect and serve communities across Queensland and the Northern Territory. Our fleet decarbonisation program began in 2009 with the introduction of our first hybrid vehicles. And in April 2022, we reached a new milestone with the deployment of eight electric vehicles!

The new Hyundai Ioniq EVs, along with twelve charging stations, were implemented at Blue Care's Caloundra, Morayfield, Redcliffe and Sandgate community care centres. The successful EV trial was undertaken in partnership with Origin Energy, and made possible by funding from the federal government's Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA).

By replacing internal combustion vehicles with EVs and hybrid vehicles, UnitingCare is seeing a significant reduction in petrol and diesel use: down 28% since 2018-19! This is a win-win-win, with lower climate change impact, cleaner air for communities, and reduced fuel costs that enables more investment in UnitingCare's services and programs.





Purchasing

Objective

Reduce environmental harm arising from the products and services we procure.

2025 Target

100%

Ensure 100% of strategic procurement tenders include environmental sustainability criteria



St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital's Environmental Sustainability Committee convene for their quarterly meeting, on benches made from recycled Kinguard.

Our progress in 2021-22

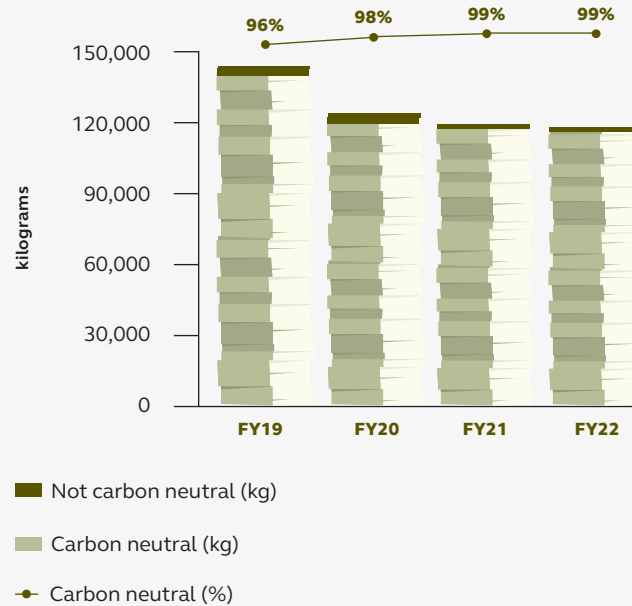
100%

strategic tenders
including
environmental
sustainability criteria

 **▼56%**

Reduced the **carbon footprint** of general anaesthesia through practitioners choosing to use the climate-friendlier sevoflurane gas instead of desflurane. This represents 1,215 tCO₂e avoided in 2021-22 when compared to 2018-19 baseline emissions.

Paper type & usage



 **▼714kg**

Hospitals and Blue Care sites transitioned from liquid to **solid detergent**, targeting a reduction of 714kg plastic packaging waste per year.



St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital furnished their revamped staff courtyard with Replas benches and tables made from **53,250 pieces of recycled plastic packaging and Kimguard** (blue sterile wrap).



Purchasing



Empowered people

Objective

Embed environmental sustainability within our work culture and practices, and support our staff and clients to contribute to UnitingCare's sustainability goals.

2025 Targets

20%

Upskill 20% of employees through environmental sustainability training

100%

Increase the number of Green Champions by 100%



UnitingCare's 2021 'Go for Green' winners, Charlie and Bai, at the Full Circle Awards ceremony.



Green Champion and Family Support Worker Diane Forsyth teaches children, alongside staff and parents at Brich St Community Hub how to use their new compost tumbler.

Our progress in 2021-22

Green Champions

▲ 20%

increase in Green Champions, from 54 in 2019-20 to 65 in 2021-22. Much of this improvement came from our hospitals, which are growing local networks of **'Waste Warriors' and 'Bin Chickens'** to drive greater recycling practices in the hospital wards and kitchens.

Trialled a new 'Green Fund', supporting the Cairns Family & Disability Services Green Team to implement a **workplace food composting initiative**.

Staff champions greening our workplaces

We are so grateful to the Green Champions across our services who work tirelessly to improve the sustainability of our organisation. Jodie Jackson is one of these champions, and has been recognised for her fantastic work towards creating a more sustainable workplace and world.

Jodie works as an Administration Officer for Blue Care on the Gold Coast, where she has led a wide range of sustainability initiatives which go well beyond her role responsibilities. Some of Jodie's projects have included introducing multi-bin systems and signage into her workplace to increase recycling, educating her colleagues on ways to protect our environment, collecting pre-loved homewares and clothing for the flood victims in Northern NSW last year, and most recently, a worm farm for her office!

Staff training

▲ 1%

Staff training and engagement remained a challenge, particularly in the face of workforce pressures. In light of this, the majority of staff training efforts focused on leveraging the influence of senior leaders. The target messaging emphasised how our leaders can embed sustainability by empowering their staff through training and recognition, as well as working to further UnitingCare's Sustainability Strategy.

Embedded environmental sustainability expectations and information into UnitingCare's employee Orientation Handbook.



Watch this video to hear Jodie speak about her inspiring work →



Recognition

UnitingCare's annual Full Circle & Reconciliation Awards celebrate our staff and volunteers who go above and beyond in their work. The 'Go for Green' award category recognises our sustainability changemakers who promote new ways to reduce our environmental footprint.

Congratulations and thank you to our 2021 nominees!

Lifeline Online Team - Finalist

Teresa Wilson (The Wesley Hospital) - Finalist

Manaini 'Bai' Bai & Jale 'Charlie' Navunicagi (St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital) - Finalist

Mark Stephens (Fleet)

Kallangur Pilgrim Aged Care Team (Blue Care)

Catarina Rogers (People & Culture)

Susan Farlow (St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital)

Elisabeth Dubois (Blue Care)

Chermside Green Team (Family & Disability Services)

Toombul Early Childhood Centre (Family & Disability Services)

Sustainability Team (UnitingCare)

Abbie Deegan (Family & Disability Services)

Karelle Filmer (Family & Disability Services)

Jed Carey (Lifeline)

Victoria Bansey (People & Culture)



Empowered people



Leadership

Objective

Accelerate societal progress towards climate resilience and environmental sustainability through advocacy, collaboration and modelling the way.

2025 Targets



Achieve our sustainability targets



Have our sustainability leadership recognised through awards



Rev. Bruce Moore, Director of Mission, provides an opening address at the Greening the Healthcare Sector Forum.

Our progress in 2021-22



Part of a global movement

On 30 November, UnitingCare co-hosted the 2021 Greening the Healthcare Sector Forum in partnership with the Climate and Health Alliance and with support from host partner Metro North Health.

Hundreds of people gathered for the conference in Meanjin/Brisbane on Yuggera & Turrbal Country, and were joined by many more online participants across Australia and New Zealand.

The conference explored the big issues and solutions to fostering a healthy future for people and the planet. It featured current research and policy to support the transition to net zero carbon and environmentally sustainable healthcare, and showcased practical examples of environmentally sustainable healthcare in action.

UnitingCare's Manager Environment Sustainability, Judene Andrews, featured on the program, sharing UnitingCare's goal and plans for achieving 100% renewable electricity by 2025.

Attendees reported they felt inspired, hopeful and motivated after the event. One respondent shared:

“ *really enjoyed hearing about the work done across the country in creating an environmentally sustainable healthcare system, and the novel solutions people in a variety of sectors are coming up with.* ”

For more information on the Forum, read the Greening the Healthcare Sector Forum 2021 Summary Report →

Climate risk framework

Commenced work on a climate risk framework, including a staff workshop to understand the impacts of climate change on the organisation and to identify and prioritise climate risks. This resulted in climate change being added to UnitingCare's enterprise risk register.

Heatwave outreach

Concluded a heatwave community outreach project, which was funded by the Department of Environment and Science to reduce health impacts of heatwaves for elderly community members. The project delivered new industry resources including:

- Expanded Environment and Emergency Response Checklist
- Heat Preparedness & Response Plan
- Heat health e-learning module
- Heat health resource & communications package

Plan showcase

Co-developed the Uniting Church Queensland Synod's 'A Flourishing Creation' 2030 Sustainability Action & Advocacy Plan. This articulates the shared position, aspirations and priorities of the church, schools and service groups in responding to the environmental challenges faced by our communities.










Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

UnitingCare's mission has a strong alignment to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide a shared blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for everyone.

Recognising the fundamental importance of planetary health for achieving human health and prosperity, this Environmental Sustainability Report focuses on the seven environment-related SDGs where we believe UnitingCare can play a transformative role based on our current impacts and risks, strategy, core capabilities and partnerships.



SDGs	SDG target	Our progress in 2021-22 (compared to 2018-19 baseline)
	3.6 Halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents	Car accidents—from both the corporate fleet and staff commuting—remained stable in the last 12 months, maintaining a 20% reduction since 2018-19 and highlighting the win-win of reduced travel for environment and safety
	6.4 Substantially increase water-use efficiency and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity	No actions reported in 2021-22
	7.2 Increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix	Onsite renewable energy generation now 1% of total consumption, up from 0.5% in 2018-19 Commenced a major roll-out of rooftop solar in May 2022, installing 18% of the projects planned 2.4 megawatts at two Blue Care aged care facilities
	11.7 Provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces	No actions reported in 2021-22
	12.5 Substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse	21% diversion rate (down from 21.5% last year) In the last 12 months, waste intensity (kg per bed day) increased in our hospitals and aged care facilities Both the diversion and waste intensity results highlight a need for greater focus on recycling and reuse programs within UnitingCare
	12.6 Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle	18 strategic tenders (100%) included evaluation criteria about companies' sustainability practices
	12.8 Ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature	Embedded environmental sustainability expectations and information into UnitingCare's employee Orientation Handbook
	13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters	Climate change was added to UnitingCare's enterprise risk register in December 2021, to drive oversight of adaptation planning at the board level
	13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning	Carbon footprint reduced by a further 1.4% in the last twelve months
	17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships	Co-hosted the 2021 Greening the Healthcare Sector Forum, bringing together 337 changemakers from over 140 health, aged care, research, consulting, service/supply and government organisations. The conference explored the big issues and solutions to fostering a healthy future for people and the planet. Continued cross-organisational sustainability collaboration through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uniting Church's 'Project Plenty' environmental sustainability working group, alongside Queensland Synod and Wesley Mission Queensland 2. Urban Utilities' Customer & Community Reference Group 3. Energy Queensland's Customer Council

Our reporting approach

This Environmental Sustainability Report provides an aggregated snapshot for all UnitingCare services in Queensland and Northern Territory, including hospitals, aged care, family and disability services, retail thrift shops, and offices.

In most cases—where sufficient data is available—the 2018-19 financial year is used as a baseline for comparison, to represent a ‘normal’ (pre-COVID-19) operating year.

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Technical notes

¹ UnitingCare’s reported carbon footprint currently includes emissions from Scope 1 (direct), Scope 2 (indirect from electricity) and limited Scope 3 (other indirect) sources – these include air travel; upstream emissions from use of paper, bottled water, and energy; and downstream emissions from waste sent to landfill. Work is underway to expand to more comprehensive Scope 3 measurement.

² Waste data is available only for operations included in UnitingCare’s consolidated waste service contract, which covers 170 of our largest sites.

³ ‘Diversion’ is calculated as the weight of recycled or rehomed items as a percentage of total non-clinical waste (i.e. all solid and liquid waste excluding clinical, pharmaceutical, cytotoxic, anatomical and sharps waste streams).

⁴ Waste intensity is calculated as the total annual waste at measured hospitals (4) and residential aged care facilities (26), divided by annual bed days (‘total bed days’ for hospital and ‘occupied bed days’ for aged care facilities).

Data corrections & developments

UnitingCare has adopted a continuous improvement approach to our sustainability reporting, and will seek to progressively increase data coverage and quality over time. Where data and reporting methodologies evolve and become universally standardised, we will retrospectively apply this to prior years and highlight where these updates have occurred.

Impact area	Development	Resulting change
Built Environment - Renewable Energy	A solar monitoring outage at twelve sites led to a previous underestimation of onsite renewable energy generation. For this FY22 report, proxy sites (same array size, brand, technology, and year of installation) were used to estimate the data gaps, conservatively assuming that the missing sites generate 90% of the annual production (kWh) as their proxies.	Baseline: No change (0.5%) 2020-21: Increased to 1% (previously reported as 0.6%)



Proudly representing

BlueCare | Lifeline | ARRCs | The Wesley Hospital | Buderim Private Hospital
St Stephen's Hospital | St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital

unitingcareqld.com.au