Dear Secretary of State,

We write to you as leaders of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, an alliance of UK health organisations including royal medical and nursing colleges, British Medical Association, Academy of Medical Science, British Medical Journal, The Lancet, and many other health-focused organisations and faculties. Our collective voice represents more than 900,000 health professionals, a significant number of whom work in the NHS.

We believe that climate change is currently the greatest threat to human health, and are acutely aware that our health service is a major contributing factor to the UK’s carbon emissions. We welcomed NHS England’s announcement in 2020 to deliver a net zero health service by 2040, and were encouraged by the leadership demonstrated by the UK during COP26 with a commitment to decarbonise healthcare – an ambition which was subsequently followed by 14 other countries. As leaders in this field, the UK now has an opportunity to cement this ambition and embed the importance of net zero healthcare within legislation.

We urge you to embed commitments to net zero within the Health and Care Bill. All legislation that passes through the House should take into consideration the fact that we are in the midst of a climate emergency. The NHS is responsible for around 40% of public sector emissions and the role it needs to play to deliver the UK’s climate change and environment goals should be strengthened in law. A strong framework in legislation shows leadership from government and will help to integrate an active response to climate change through every layer of the NHS, including the new Integrated Care Boards.

The climate crisis is already resulting in negative health impacts as a consequence of extreme weather, polluted air, food and water shortages, forced migration, and the aggravation of disease. We must do all we can to ensure the health and care services that people turn to during ill health, is not one of the major contributing factors to that ill health. By embedding a commitment to net zero in the Health and Care Bill the UK can lead the way in achieving this.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further if you required further input or information.

Kind regards

Dr Richard Smith CBE, FMedSci, Chair UK Health Alliance on Climate Change
Dr Elaine Mulcahy, Director UK Health Alliance on Climate Change
Gemma Campbell, Chief Executive Officer Association of Anaesthetists
Professor Andrew Elder, President Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh
Professor Andrew Goddard, President Royal College of Physicians, London
James Gore, Chief Executive Faculty of Public Health
Professor Mike Griffin, President Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
Dr Katherine Henderson, President Royal College of Emergency Medicine
Dr Adrian James, President Royal College of Psychiatrists
Dr Camilla Kingdon, President Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
Mr Mike McKirdy, President Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow
Dr Sandy Mather, Chief Executive Officer Intensive Care Society
Dr Edward Morris, President Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
Professor Neil Mortensen, President Royal College of Surgeons
Professor Mike Wang, Chair Association of Clinical Psychologists UK
Dr Latifa Patel, Interim Representative Body Chair BMA
Garry Waltham, Chief Executive Officer Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare