

The Chair

Australian Government Productivity Commission
Circular.economy@pc.gov.au

NSW Health Response – Productivity Commission’s Circular Economy Inquiry

Dear Chair

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to this Inquiry.

NSW Health produces approximately 20,000 tonnes of waste every year. Much of this is medical waste that must be disposed of appropriately. However, there are a number of circular economy opportunities to divert non-medical waste from landfill. Considering this, the Climate Risk and Net Zero Unit, System Purchasing Branch, NSW Ministry of Health wishes to share information about circular economy opportunities and challenges across our organisation.

Circular Economy Opportunities

Circularity initiatives are emerging across NSW Local Health Districts, including reprocessing projects and replacing single-use items with reusable equipment. This includes:

- In FY23, John Hunter Hospital diverted 18 tonnes of plastic otherwise destined for landfill, including 12 tonnes of soft plastic (e.g. sterile wrap, and IV bags) and 6 tonnes of hard plastics (e.g. baby bottles and plastic packaging). Plasmar recycled these materials into fence posts and strainers.
- The Going Circular Project, from HealthShare NSW, expands on EnableNSW’s existing sustainable equipment model by re-issuing returned respiratory equipment (CPAP machines and bi-level ventilators). This was supported by clinical expert research in SLHD which found no bacteria in air samples from PAP devices after cleaning, demonstrating the safety of re-use.
- The Waste Action Reuse Portal (WARPIT), led by SWSLHD, repurposes furniture and office equipment, reducing the need for new purchases and diverting items from landfill. This initiative facilitates the redistribution of surplus items across multiple healthcare facilities, promoting sustainability and cost savings within the District.

Circularity risks and challenges

Implementing circularity in healthcare presents several risks and challenges, particularly around compliance with strict regulatory frameworks such as those set by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). Ensuring that recycled or repurposed medical devices meet safety and quality standards can be complex, while maintaining infection control and managing liability concerns. Additionally, balancing innovation with regulatory approvals may slow adoption, creating barriers to scaling circular practices across the sector.

Contact

Thank you for driving progress in this crucial area. If further information is required, please contact:
MOH-netzero@health.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Kate Charlesworth

Medical Director, Climate Risk and Net Zero Unit, Ministry of Health