



KEY OUTCOMES

OF THE

DIALOGUE PLATFORM

„RESOURCE EFFICIENCY IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR“

2022-2023

Established by:

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Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Pro-
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VDI Competence Center for Resource Efficiency

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Management Summary

This document briefly presents key outcomes of the dialog platform "Resource efficiency in the healthcare sector". The platform was initiated jointly by the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG) and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) based on input from a scientific expert meeting, which took place in May 2022 in Berlin.

According to a study conducted by the German Environment Agency, raw material consumption in the German healthcare sector amounted to 107 million tonnes in 2016, which corresponds to more than 5% of total German raw material consumption (UBA (ed.) 2021). In addition, the healthcare sector is responsible for around 6% of national greenhouse gas emissions (PIK 2023).

Therefore, the dialog platform brought together relevant stakeholders from practice, associations, business, science and civil society from both policy fields¹ to jointly identify and discuss the relevance and potential of measures to foster resource efficiency and circular economy in the healthcare sector. Thus, the dialog platform contributed to implementing one particular measure of the third German resource efficiency programme ProgRess III, namely, to analyse the interface between resources and health in order to exploit synergies and avoid or reduce conflicts of objectives.

The dialog platform commenced via an inaugural meeting in October 2022 and ran until November 2023, including five hybrid or online meetings.

The discussions concerning resource efficiency were based on a broad definition of natural resources and the VDI Standard 4800 Blatt 1 (Resource efficiency – Methodological principles and strategies), supplemented by an understanding of circular economy as covering the entire product life cycle in accordance with the European Circular Economy Action Plan.

Following a broad understanding of the system, the healthcare system comprises (1) the framework (state actors at all levels), (2) the organisation of healthcare (self-administration), (3) the actual healthcare provision (including associations as interest groups), (4) the upstream services with essential goods, services, and products.

Against this background the dialog platform focused on the following topics:

- Hygiene and resource conservation – options for action and conflicting objectives.
- Waste prevention and waste management – approaches, barriers and opportunities.
- Resource-conserving procurement – opportunities and framework conditions.
- Resource conservation and pharmaceuticals – efficiency and circular economy potential.
- Resource conservation and medical devices – service life, reuse, and recycling.

The following selection of recommendations constitutes a synthesis (prepared by the Secretariat, in coordination with BMG and BMUV) of key findings from expert input and discussions in the platform. As such, they do not present a consensual conclusion or a jointly supported position paper, nor do they claim to be exhaustive. The order of the recommendations ranges from greater potential influence of stakeholders in healthcare facilities towards more systemic recommendations.

¹ Core members of the platform included relevant professional associations in the healthcare sector at the federal level (the Federal Union of German Associations of Pharmacists, the German Medical Association, the Federal Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry, the German Medical Technology Association, the German Hospital Federation, and the German Nursing Council) as well as scientific institutions (Federal Environment Agency, Charité University Medicine Berlin, Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research (ISI), Robert Koch Institute, Sana Kliniken AG, viamedica Foundation for Healthy Medicine, and the University of Greifswald).

Recommendations – Approaches and Options to Act to Foster Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy in the Healthcare Sector

A. Strengthen communication, cooperation, and employee involvement for resource efficiency and the circular economy

1. Strengthen cross-divisional exchange and cooperation.
2. Expand and utilise communication and employee involvement.
3. Strengthen communication between institutions and stakeholders along value chains.

B. Convince and motivate management to support resource efficiency and circular economy measures through positive specialist effects

1. Convince executives and top management and ensure their support for sustainability.
2. Review the extent to which resource efficiency and the circular economy can be considered in job advertisements.

C. Expand and consolidate education, training, and further education for resource efficiency and the circular economy in the healthcare sector

1. Integrate resource efficiency and circular economy into the training and further education of all relevant professional groups at all hierarchical levels.

D. Improve data availability for ecological-economic assessments of medical products and pharmaceuticals and strengthen transparency

1. Strengthen data availability for ecological-economic life cycle assessments.
2. Provide and use trustworthy and reliable certificates and evidence.

E. Promote research, implementation projects, and digitisation for resource efficiency and the circular economy

1. Promote and jointly implement research and pilot projects.
2. Promote collaborative implementation projects for testing and demonstration purposes.
3. Foster digitisation in the healthcare sector (e.g., 3D-printing and digital patient files).

F. Promote ecodesign for medical devices and pharmaceuticals

1. Align guidelines and specifications for the design and construction of medical devices and products more closely with ecodesign and circularity.

G. Use economic incentives for more circular medical devices and resource conservation in the healthcare sector

1. Internalise external environmental and social costs and improve remuneration and billability.
2. Foster sustainable procurement.

H. Identify and shape framework conditions in the healthcare sector that enable resource efficiency and a circular economy

1. Review and, if necessary, adapt existing framework conditions to better reflect resource efficiency and the circular economy while complying with hygiene requirements.
2. Advance new initiatives and framework conditions for resource efficiency and the circular economy.

Results of the individual meetings can be found in more detail in German only here: <https://www.ressource-deutschland.de/ergebnispapier-naress-ag-3-ressourceneffizienz-im-gesundheitswesen/>.

Plans and Next Steps to Further the Topic Area in Germany

The dialogue platform concluded with a final conference on the subject in early June 2024 (see the following link, German only: <https://www.neress.de/termine/neress-konferenzen/28-netzwerkkonferenz/>). By reaching out through their networks and other events, the various stakeholders participating in the dialogue platform and its meetings helped embed the topic in further conferences, fora, organisational developments, and exchange networks.

One prime example is the so-called Health Climate Pact. The German Federal Health Minister signed the “Health Climate Pact” together with representatives of leading organisations in the healthcare sector², the federal states, and the municipal umbrella organisations in December 2022. According to this pact, the stakeholders want to utilise their options for action in the various areas of care and take sustainability and climate protection criteria even more into account in the future. In a continuous strategy process, they are developing ideas, goals and measures for joint action and a coordinated approach in their respective areas of activity in order to achieve the goal of climate neutrality and to work on other fields of action.

During one meeting of the signatories to the Health Climate Pact, the present key findings of the dialogue platform were presented. In upcoming meetings and activities of the signatories, resource efficiency and the circular economy could thus feature more prominently as fields of action.

References Used

PIK (2023): Evidenzbasis Treibhausgasemissionen des deutschen Gesundheitswesens (German-HealthCFP). Abschlussbericht, September 2023 [online][retrieved on: 14.08.2024], available at: <https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/service/publikationen/details/evidenzbasis-treibhausgasemissionen-des-deutschen-gesundheitswesens-germanhealthcfp>

UBA (Ed.) (2021): Ressourcenschonung im Gesundheitssektor – Erschließung von Synergien zwischen den Politikfeldern Ressourcenschonung und Gesundheit. UBA-Texte 15/2021, UBA, Dessau-Roßlau [online][retrieved on: 14.08.2024], available at: <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/publikationen/ressourcenschonung-im-gesundheitssektor>

² Among these were also four organisations that served as core members of the dialogue platform: the Federal Union of German Associations of Pharmacists, the German Medical Association, the German Hospital Federation, and the German Nursing Council.