

## Reducing single use plastics

### South West Healthcare

#### Demographic information

South West Healthcare provides over 150 medical nursing, mental health, allied health and community health services across 15 facilities in southwest Victoria, covering Warrnambool City and the Shires of Corangamite, Glenelg, Moyne and Southern Grampians.

#### GGHH agenda goals

- Waste
- Purchasing

#### Case study summary

South West Healthcare are focusing on replacing single use plastics with biodegradable and compostable products, avoiding hundreds of thousands of plastic items from entering landfill. This included purchasing already available items, and providing feedback to a supplier supporting the development of fully compostable anaesthetic trays.

#### The issue

The items used to deliver healthcare services have a significant environmental footprint. This area is known as resource procurement and has impacts on both waste to landfill and emissions into the environment. Globally, 300 million tonnes of plastic are produced annually, causing significant harm via its production and disposal. Up to 12.7 million tonnes of plastic finds its way into our oceans each year. Therefore, it is critical to find sustainable alternatives to plastic products in healthcare. As part of their overall commitment to sustainability, South West Healthcare is focusing on reducing harmful environmental impacts associated with their resource procurement.



## Hospital goal

- Reduce single use medical plastic waste

## Sustainability strategy implemented

South West Healthcare has an Environmental Management Plan which details actions to deliver greener healthcare. The plan covers diverse aspects of sustainability, ranging from energy use, to waste and recycling and climate change adaptation. A Sustainability Committee and Waste Working Group oversee the delivery of sustainability activity. The clinical consumables product advisor sits on the Waste Working Group and oversees the review of new clinical products as part of their role. The advisor ensures items are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and then uses a series of criteria to assess whether more eco-friendly alternatives can be used.

South West Healthcare reviewed eco-friendly alternatives for high volume single use plastic items. A few suppliers were already providing some items made of compostable materials. South West Healthcare provided feedback about how other items would need to perform in a clinical setting. This feedback was used by a supplier to develop a sterile anaesthetic pack.

## Implementation process

The Environmental Management Plan at South West Healthcare was developed utilising the Victorian Department of Health EMP template, which includes a range of evidence-based mandatory and voluntary actions for health services. South West Healthcare consulted relevant staff to determine which actions to include in the plan. Consultation enabled buy-in and ambition from people working within their area of expertise and influence.

Through consultation, representatives from resource procurement identified the review and replacement of high-volume single use plastic clinical consumable items as an achievable focus area for the Environmental Management Plan.



South West Healthcare offers clinical choice and trialling to review new products that look likely to be fit for purpose, and have an added value, such as clinical efficacy, cost or environmental impact. By embedding sustainability in this process, clinicians and resource procurement staff can consistently identify and evaluate new products, and provide feedback for items being developed for market. If an

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alternative is deemed satisfactory, single use plastic items may be ‘deranged’ – a great term for being taken off the list of options for staff to select.

## Tracking progress

Compostable straws, injection trays, kidney dishes, denture pots and lids and anaesthetic trays were all offered as a choice for 12 months, and now are the single use version on offer.

Internal staff communication reflects other positive benefits, such as decreased cost and improved clinical processes. South West Healthcare also worked with their Supplier on a Case Study to increase awareness of health service appetite for this product. This was done with the aim of encouraging other suppliers to develop plastic free alternatives.

## Progress achieved

- In one year, South West Healthcare avoided sending 328,000 pieces of plastic medical waste to landfill. This included plastic straws, injection trays, kidney dishes, denture pots and lids, and anaesthetic trays.
- Provided feedback to a supplier regarding how products need to perform in clinical settings, leading to the production of fit-for- purpose compostable alternatives to common plastic items.

## Challenges and lessons learned

Any item that South West Healthcare introduces has to be ‘fit for purpose’ – meaning it must be TGA-approved, provide its intended function, and have significant additional benefits to the existing item. The cost of compostable items have been a barrier until recently, with the price point of items starting to be more closely aligned to plastic alternatives. Watching the market and determining a price point where an item may be considered feasible has been an important process for South West Healthcare.

## Next steps

South West Healthcare plans to continue partnering with suppliers of compostable clinical consumable items. They are currently helping to support the development of a sustainable urinary catheter insertion pack by EcoAid.

The Sustainability Committee and Waste Working Group intend to continue progress on their Environmental Management Plan with a priority focus on reducing emissions.

Finally, South West Healthcare is aiming to divert compostable items to a Food Organics and Green Organics waste stream (FOGO). This process was trialled with kidney dishes used at the South West

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Healthcare COVID Vaccination Centre. The trial involved a collaborative effort with the local council and the FOGO contractor to determine that only compostable items would be included.

**Links:**

- [Article by EcoAid](#)
- [Victorian Department of Health template](#)

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