

Planetary Health Report Card: Increasing Climate Change Awareness and Accountability at the University of Minnesota Medical School

Author/s: Gabriela Christensen, Leyla Taghizadeh, Peyton Nelson, Aarohi Shah

In its sixth year of participation in the global Planetary Health Report Card advocacy tool project, the overall grade for the 2024-2025 University of Minnesota - Twin Cities Medical School's Planetary Health Report Card is an A-. While this was a notable improvement from last year's C grade, recent changes to the wording of certain sections in this year's project expanded the criteria to include sustainability measures at a broader institutional level, rather than at just a medical school level. Thus, we hope to use this tool to continue to advocate for increased sustainability measures, especially within the Medical School.

The University of Minnesota as a whole again thrived in the research sector, with a dedicated institute for planetary health research, many faculty focused in the area, and an annual sustainability symposium held in the spring. Recent medical school curriculum changes have significantly strengthened the integration of planetary health, providing students with more opportunities to explore climate-related health impacts. With an expanded focus, particularly in the context of Minnesota, the curriculum better equips future healthcare professionals to address the evolving intersection of climate and public health. Similarly, the university excels in support for student-led initiatives, with a centralized Office of Sustainability webpage to guide students to projects and research, in addition to hosting numerous speaker events, volunteering opportunities, and outdoors programs.

The PHRC highlighted several important areas for sustainability improvement, especially in the areas of campus sustainability and community outreach and advocacy. Some of our initial recommendations include updating the Office of Sustainability webpage with current renewable energy usage information, further integration of the 2023 Twin Cities Climate Action Plan into the Medical School, improving sourcing of local and sustainable food procurement, and increasing community-facing programs related to the health impacts of climate change, centered on the perspectives of these communities. Additionally, as a whole, we encourage the Medical School to continue to find ways to collaborate with, advertise, and support many of the great sustainability initiatives that the university has already established.

We aim to use this year's PHRC as an advocacy tool for incorporating a sustainable healthcare agenda into the Medical School, beginning with presenting our work at various conferences, such as the MMCGME Quality Forum, to share our findings with a greater audience. Likewise, we aim to use the PHRC as a tool to support our recommendations for increased campus sustainability efforts and community outreach and advocacy.