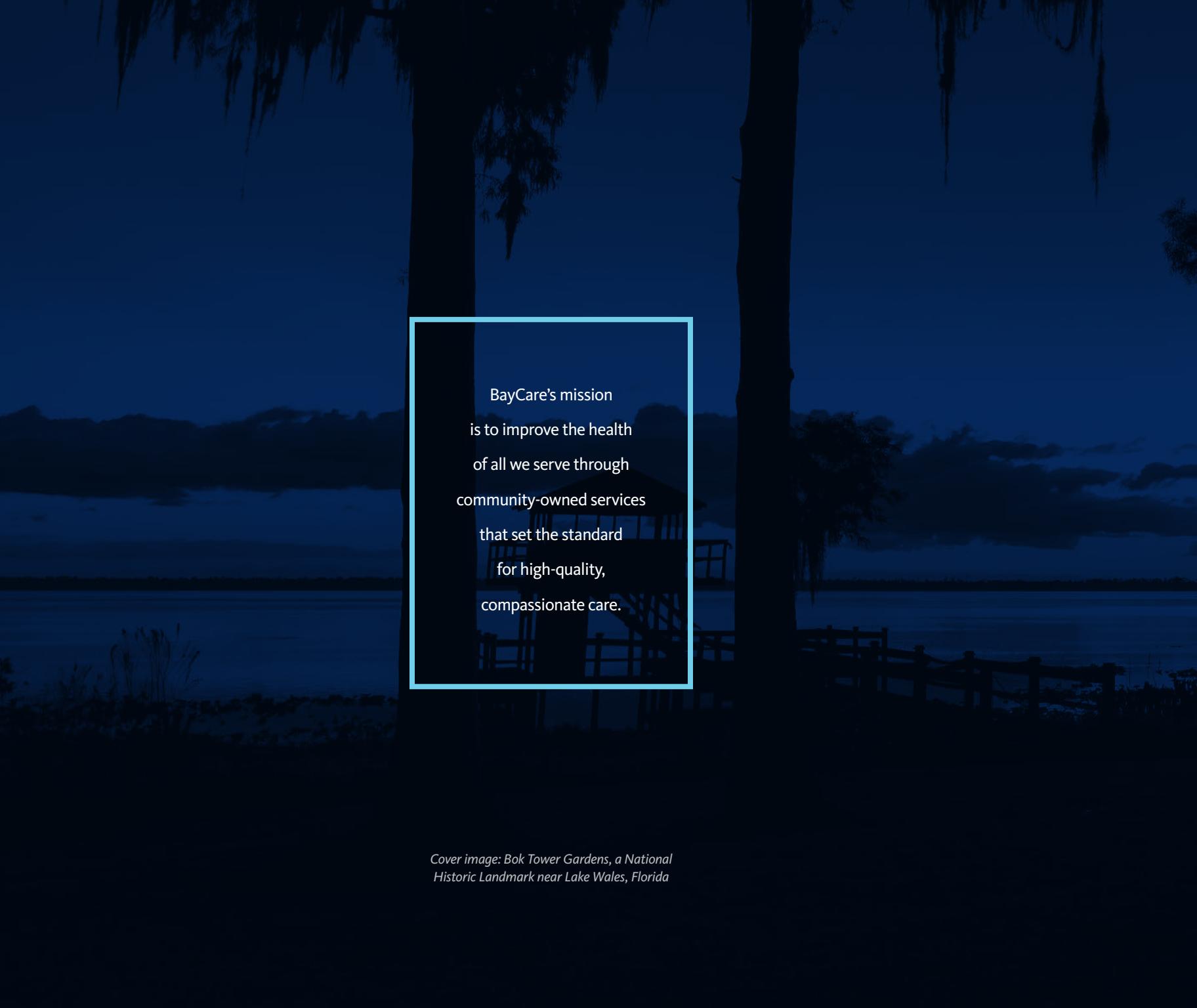




## Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) Implementation Plans Polk County 2026-2028





BayCare's mission  
is to improve the health  
of all we serve through  
community-owned services  
that set the standard  
for high-quality,  
compassionate care.

*Cover image: Bok Tower Gardens, a National  
Historic Landmark near Lake Wales, Florida*

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# Letter From the Presidents

To all the communities we serve,

With deep roots in Polk County, BayCare Health System is a vital community partner driven to improve quality of life beyond hospital walls. In this booklet, you'll find how BayCare extends its mission to improve the health of all we serve.

Since 2019, BayCare has collaborated as a founding member of the All4HealthFL Collaborative to conduct three Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs) in Polk County. Based in West Central Florida, the All4HealthFL Collaborative includes seven hospital systems and four departments of health. The collaborative strives to improve community health by leading outcome-driven health initiatives in the region.

Together, we engaged in the process of analyzing local, state and national primary and secondary data. We facilitated focus groups, conducted key informant interviews and, most importantly, surveyed county residents. Because of the 2025 CHNA process, we now have a deeper understanding of the unmet health needs and barriers to care in Polk County and the region. The resulting Community Health Implementation Plans (CHIPs) form the basis of our Community Benefit outreach programs to address Access to Health, Behavioral Health and Exercise, Nutrition and Weight.

.....  
**\$467** Million

The amount of Community Benefit that BayCare delivered in 2024 through charity and uncompensated care and community services.



BayCare's three hospitals in Polk County—Bartow Regional Medical Center, Winter Haven Hospital and Winter Haven Women's Hospital—have aligned our implementation plans to address these needs with a unified approach. This ensures that our collective resources are targeted for the greatest possible impact on our community's health.

This booklet contains BayCare's detailed implementation plan to address the CHNA-identified needs through 2028. We encourage you to use this information to guide additional discussions with key change-makers and leaders.

We're deeply grateful to all the organizations and individuals who contributed invaluable time and efforts to this ongoing CHNA process. Together, we can look forward to shared success and a better quality of life for all residents.

Sincerely,



**Karen Kerr**  
*President, Bartow Regional Medical Center*



**Thomas Garthwaite**  
*President, Winter Haven Hospital and Winter Haven Women's Hospital*

# Listening to Polk County

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Every three years, the All4HealthFL Collaborative engages the community to understand the issues affecting health and well-being in Polk County. Recognizing that any outcome-driven plan must be grounded in data and in listening to community voices, BayCare and its All4HealthFL partners began their outreach in Polk County in the fall of 2024. The collaborative developed a 71-question survey to capture the health challenges and perceptions of Polk County residents. The purpose was to understand the issues affecting health and the community resources available to improve health outcomes.

The survey addressed health and lifestyle behaviors, quality of life and access to care. By intentionally reaching out to those most affected by health issues in the places they live, work, play and raise their families, BayCare ensured that Polk County residents were meaningfully included in the conversation.

The community survey used validated and reliable questions obtained from state and national needs assessments. It passed a rigorous literacy review and was available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Russian and Vietnamese. In addition, the collaborative engaged a health equity expert to validate the language of survey questions and responses to ensure equity for all respondents.

BayCare and its partners distributed the survey in libraries, churches, clinics, food pantries and community centers, in either paper or electronic format, utilizing a direct link or QR code for easy access. This approach allowed for engagement of low-income, minority and medically underserved populations.

Following hurricanes Helene and Milton, the survey was paused for about 10 weeks to allow time for the communities to recover from the storms. These data informed BayCare's Community Health Implementation Plan (CHIP) for 2026-2028. Through the survey outreach and in-person meetings with stakeholders, the collaborative guaranteed that the perspectives and experiences of community members directly shaped the understanding of local health needs, fostering an inclusive and representative assessment process.



*Physicians from the Winter Haven Hospital/Florida State University Family Medicine Residency Program volunteer their time to provide free school and sports physicals.*



# Growing in Our Commitment

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The 2026-2028 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) identified three primary unmet health needs: Access to Health and Social Services, Behavioral Health (including mental health and substance use) and Exercise, Nutrition and Weight. These results mirror the 2023-2025 CHNA results, which highlights the complex nature of these issues, and the need for sustained attention and action. Additionally, this year's assessment has brought to light the issue of economic stability as an emerging concern, particularly as it relates to an individual's capacity to achieve optimal health outcomes.

By continuing to focus on these specific areas over the long term, we can build on our current successful strategies while developing additional partnerships and programs that will continue to improve health outcomes. In addition, we have the unique opportunity for in-depth evaluation to measure the effectiveness of our interventions and refine our approaches based on evidence gathered over time.

BayCare looks forward to working with our communities to create a resource-rich community environment where everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy and balanced lifestyle.



*A child selects groceries at a BayCare Feeding Minds food pantry.*

## Identifying Priorities



# Identifying Priorities

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The following health issues were identified after a review of the 2025 CHNA survey results, focus group findings and a secondary health statistics data analysis:

- Access to health and social services
- Behavioral health (including mental health and substance use)
- Cancer
- Dental
- Economic stability
- Exercise, nutrition and weight
- Heart disease and stroke
- Neighborhood and built environment

In addition, discussion groups comprised of advocates and community partners convened to gain greater insight into these health issues. Guided by facilitators, the discussion groups used a participatory analysis technique that engaged participants in guided discussion around specific topics using data placemats. The placemats displayed thematically grouped data, charts and graphs in an easy-to-understand format. Discussions were structured in three groupings focused on data review, severity and feasibility and potential strategies. Below are a few examples of the questions posed during discussion. For a full list, go to All4HealthFL.org to view the CHNA reports.

- What factors might explain the patterns we're seeing in this data?
- Do the findings align with your knowledge of your community?
- What's currently being done in the community to address this need?
- What partnerships and collaborations need to occur to move the dial on addressing this need in the community?

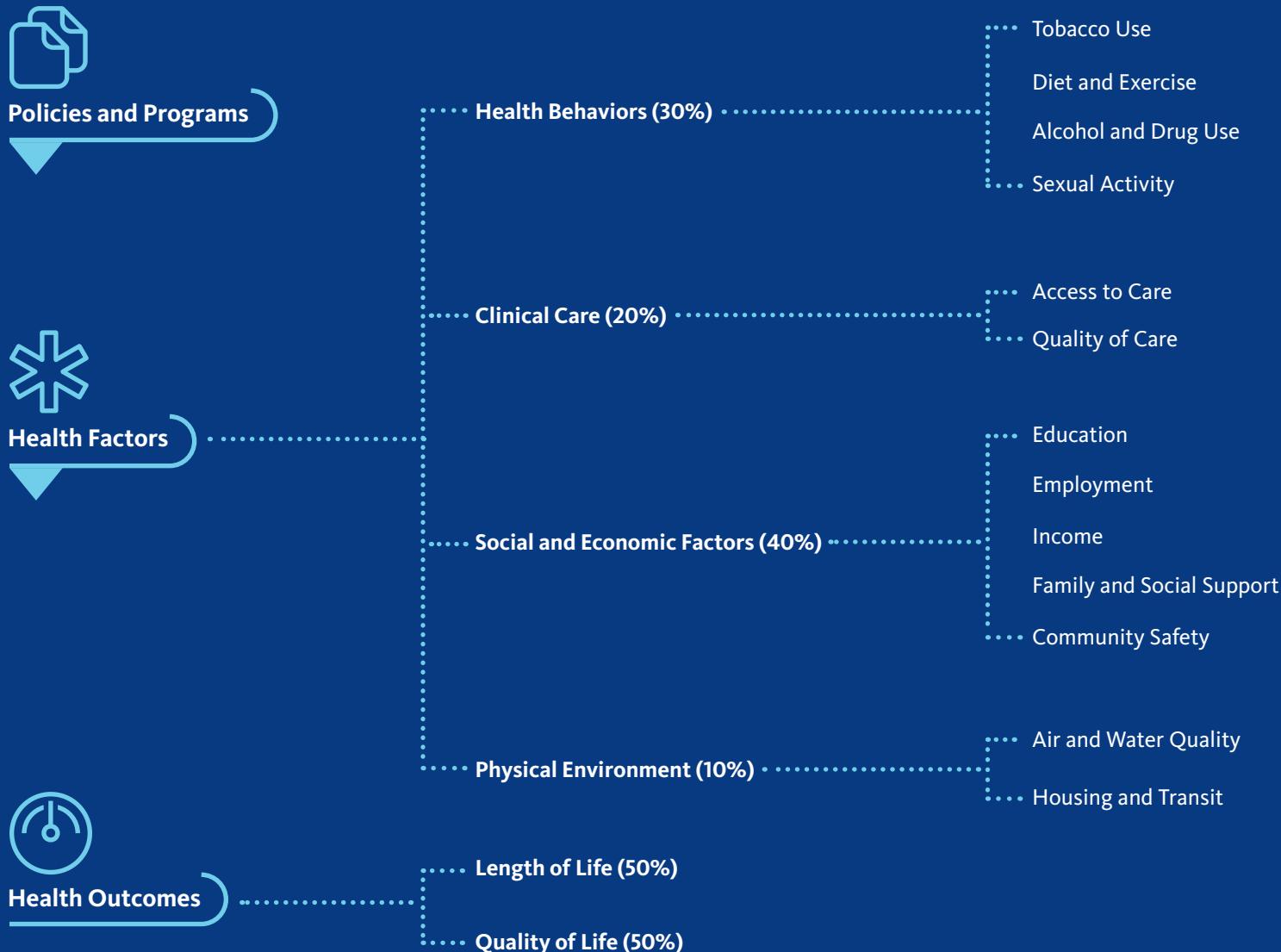
Following the guided discussions, Crescendo Consulting Group—the chosen vendor for the collaborative CHNA—led the participants in a prioritization exercise. Each of the health issues was presented for ranking based on the scope and severity of the issue. Using an online voting system, each attendee ranked the issues from the most to least pressing. For the prioritization exercises, the top three focus areas for the 2026-2028 CHNA implementation plans are:

- Access to health and social services
- Behavioral health (including mental health and substance use)
- Exercise, nutrition and weight

The remaining health needs—cancer, heart disease and stroke, dental, neighborhood and built environment—are significant but aren't directly addressed in the 2026–2028 implementation plans. However, these health issues will continue to be impacted through existing BayCare strategies for clinical excellence as well as other efforts in the community, including collaborative efforts with partners such as the Florida Department of Health in Polk County.

Economic stability, the remaining unmet health need, highlights the direct correlation between economic hardship and health, underscoring the need to address this issue with purposeful intent. Understanding this connection, BayCare has intentionally developed projects and partnerships that foster opportunities for equitable access to resources that alleviate the stress of economic instability.

# Improving Health Is More Than Just Accessing Health Care



Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2022

# Developing a Strategic Implementation Plan

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The comprehensive CHNA process provides BayCare's Polk County hospitals with a data-driven framework for improving community health. While we recognize that no assessment can capture every individual's unique experience, the data clearly reveals significant health disparities linked to race, ethnicity, income, geography and education.

Building on our commitment to improving Polk County's health and well-being, the Bartow Regional Medical Center Board of Directors and the Winter Haven Hospitals Board of Trustees approved strategies and the 2026-2028 implementation plans to drive health improvement outcomes.

The 2026-2028 implementation plans for BayCare's Polk County hospitals were thoughtfully developed to leverage hospital and community resources, while also working collaboratively across multiple sectors. BayCare forms intentional partnerships with trusted and established community organizations to support programs that meet the identified community health needs. We partner proactively with these organizations to identify and track impactful program outcomes. Through regular program monitoring, BayCare's Community Benefit team encourages adaptability and problem-solving to maintain program fidelity. To align with population and public health best practices and acknowledge that improving health is more than just accessing health care, the plans include a strong and directed focus on the social determinants that impact health.



*BayCare team members sort donated goods at a food distribution.*



# Access to Health and Social Services

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The ability to locate and receive health care and connections to social services in a timely manner is critical in maintaining an optimal level of health and overall quality of life. Access to comprehensive, quality health and social service resources is important for:

- Promoting and maintaining health
- Preventing and managing disease
- Reducing unnecessary disability and premature death

Access to health care services can be disproportionately impacted by many variables. Key areas of need within this priority area revolve around cost of care, obtaining timely appointments and general health literacy. For this reason, BayCare continues to expand support of local free or reduced-cost clinics that have well-established relationships within the community. These clinics provide an array of services including medication assistance programs, dosing instructions and education, primary and specialty care and wraparound services in the social care space. As social conditions change, these clinics are experiencing increased volume and demand, demonstrating the importance of our continued support to ensure these resources can rise to meet this growing need.

## Access to Health and Social Services Goal

Reduce barriers and facilitate equitable pathways for underserved community members to access timely, affordable and appropriate resources that improve health outcomes.

### Objective:

By December 31, 2028, expand access to health and social services that improve quality of life and health outcomes through trusted partnerships that address workforce development, resource hubs, navigation and health care services, among others.



BayCare's Community Health team brings family-friendly health education and seasonal fun to the Bartow Trunk or Treat event.



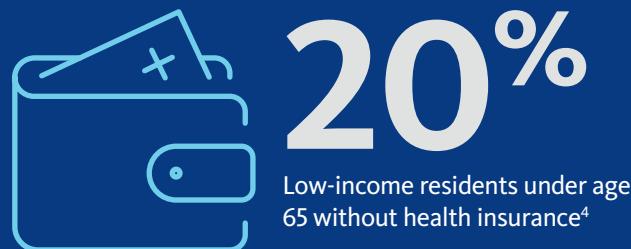
**1 in 7 Florida residents**  
under age 65 are uninsured  
(worse than U.S. average)

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<sup>1</sup>State Health Access Data Assistance Center, 2023 Uninsurance Rate Study, FL.

## Access to Health and Social Services in Polk County

### Barriers for those who can't get medical care:<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>All4HealthFL Survey data 2025.

<sup>2</sup>FL Health CHARTS, 2023; Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey.

<sup>3</sup>County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2025.

<sup>4</sup>American Community Survey, 2023.

<sup>5</sup>All4HealthFL Survey data 2025.

# Access to Health and Social Services

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## Impact Objectives

- Extend partnership with FindHelpFlorida.com that enhances the ability to locate, connect with and refer to community resources.
- Support the Medication Assistance Program that provides cost savings to community members through identifying discounted or alternative generic medications.
- Enhance access to health screenings and educational opportunities by reducing barriers and engaging with individuals in their communities through the Faith Community Nursing team.
- Collaborate with the Neighborhood Service Center to provide reliable access to a safe day space, hot meals, a food pantry and health screenings and education for seniors and community members in need in Winter Haven.
- Expand access to showers, laundry, hot meals, a food pantry and additional wraparound supportive services for unhoused community members in partnership with the Bartow Community Service Center.
- Support a growing food pantry and a wellness center director at Gospel, Inc., in Lakeland, providing case management and health and social service navigation assistance to formerly homeless individuals.
- Advance partnership with Lakeland Volunteers in Medicine to support operations of a satellite clinic two days per week on Bartow Regional Medical Center's campus, providing access to free health care for qualifying Polk County residents.
- Enhance career readiness of high school seniors via a health care-focused workforce development program with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Polk County.\*
- Create education opportunities with Girls Scouts of West Central Florida that promote mental and physical well-being for Girl Scouts during their camp offerings.\*

\*Indicates pediatric-specific impact objective



# Behavioral Health

Behavioral health, including mental health and substance use, can influence an individual's day-to-day experiences, relationships and overall health outcomes. Behavioral health care includes a continuum from prevention and wellness activities through outpatient therapy, medications, acute hospital-based care and community-based services. Recent research found that seven in 10 residents in West Central Florida experienced at least one poor mental health day in the past month.<sup>1</sup> Despite continued efforts, many people still struggle to access the care they need due to stigma, misperceptions about behavioral health and the nature of behavioral health disorders.

Through community connections, BayCare elevates supportive services such as free mental health counseling, prevention and recovery efforts for substance use, behavioral health education, peer support programs and a youth-centered anti-stigma campaign. BayCare strives to create opportunities that are intentionally designed to meet the unique needs of some of the community's most underserved populations.

Our CHNA survey identified that 20% of senior respondents indicated having a diagnosis of depression and/or anxiety.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, BayCare partnered with Seniors in Service to support their Health Buddies program that directly addresses the health and social needs of these individuals. Over the course of this 12-week telephonic intervention, seniors report improved mental health outcomes and decreased utilization of emergency resources. This work demonstrates BayCare's commitment to serving special populations and their mental well-being.

## Behavioral Health Goal

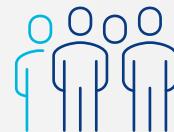
Foster the growth and development of interventions that enhance the community's capacity to address identified behavioral health needs through strategic partnerships.

### Objective:

By December 31, 2028, coordinate a multifaceted, cross-sectional behavioral health portfolio of initiatives that reduce stigma, expand access and address emerging topics, with a focus on serving special populations.



BayCare Community Benefit team member Meghan Mapes shares *On Our Sleeves* resources from The Kids Mental Health Foundation with team members and visitors at Winter Haven Hospital.



**Nearly 1 in 4 U.S. adults**  
experience mental illness  
every year.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tampa Bay Thrives 2024 Resident Mental Health Study.

<sup>2</sup>All4HealthFL Community Health Needs Assessment Survey, 2025.

<sup>3</sup>National Survey on Drug Use and Mental Health, 2024.

## Behavioral Health in Polk County

**20%**

Depression among adults<sup>1</sup>



**29.8**

Drug overdose deaths per 100,000 population (higher than Florida average)<sup>2</sup>



**21%**

Alcohol-impaired driving deaths (higher than Florida average)<sup>3</sup>



**28%**

Students who ever drank alcohol (higher than Florida average)<sup>4</sup>



**790**

Residents for every one mental health provider (worse than Florida average)<sup>5</sup>



<sup>1</sup>CDC PLACES, 2022.

<sup>2</sup>FL Health CHARTS, 2024; Overdoses.

<sup>3</sup>County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2025.

<sup>4</sup>FL Health CHARTS, 2023; Exposure and Risk Behaviors.

<sup>5</sup>County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2025.

# Behavioral Health

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## Impact Objectives

- Educate community members on how to identify and support an individual experiencing a behavioral health crisis through Mental Health First Aid training in partnership with Heart for Winter Haven.
- Partner with the Seniors in Service Health Buddies program to combat loneliness and empower isolated community members to manage their health and chronic conditions.
- In partnership with Tampa Bay Thrives, support a regionwide anti-stigma campaign entitled *If You Know You Know*, enabling community members to share their mental health journeys and tools, as well as *Zen Dens* in local high schools, providing a supportive space focused on mental wellness and empowering students to manage their well-being.
- Expand the street outreach efforts of the Florida Harm Reduction Collective, increasing access to Narcan, hygiene supplies and connection to treatment for people who use drugs.
- Collaborate with Polk for Recovery to strengthen the workforce of behavioral health peers through training, certification and job placement.
- Increase access to medically supervised substance use detoxification and wraparound services at Tri-County Human Services.
- Facilitate access to no-cost mental health counseling, small groups and workshops for underserved Polk County residents in partnership with Heart for Winter Haven.
- Support a peer specialist at Gospel, Inc., in Lakeland to aid formerly homeless community members in their behavioral health recovery journeys.
- Amplify the regionwide initiatives of The Kids Mental Health Foundation public awareness and resource campaign to break child mental health stigmas and educate families and others interacting with children.\*

\*Indicates pediatric-specific impact objective



# Exercise, Nutrition and Weight

Access to nutritious food has been consistently identified as an unmet need within Polk County, often making it difficult for residents to achieve desired health outcomes. In addition to a nutritious diet, regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight can positively impact health by improving blood pressure and preventing heart disease, diabetes, stroke, certain cancers and a number of other health concerns.

Over the course of our previous CHNA cycle (2023-2025), BayCare's commitment to food insecurity had ensured access to reliable food sources for over 93,000 families through our 42 school-based food pantries across the West Central Florida footprint. These food pantries provide easily accessible, shelf-stable food items conveniently located on school campuses where staff, students and families can shop before, during or after school.

To deepen our impact, we've created a county food clinic model where community members can access nutritionally dense food options such as fresh produce, whole grains, frozen lean protein sources and other shelf-stable items. In addition, this model provides wraparound services such as resource navigation, nutrition education and health screenings.

We recognize that addressing food insecurity is only part of the solution, therefore, BayCare also supports programs that promote physical activity for youth and adults as well as interventions on chronic disease management.

## Exercise, Nutrition and Weight Goal

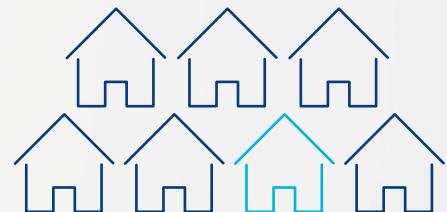
Create opportunities for residents to develop healthy behaviors that address weight and physical activity while ensuring access to nutritious and reliable food sources.

### Objective:

By December 31, 2028, advance community projects and partnerships that promote health and nutrition education, screenings, exercise initiatives, chronic disease management and place-based food resources.



Dr. Yashica Albert, wellness center director at Gospel, Inc., welcomes Gospel Village residents and community members to the food pantry at Gospel, Inc., in Lakeland.



**1 in 7 U.S. households**  
identify as food insecure<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2023.

## Exercise, Nutrition and Weight in Polk County

**12%**

Diagnosed diabetes among adults (worse than U.S. average)<sup>1</sup>



**41%**

Adults who are obese<sup>2</sup>



**18%**

Children who live in poverty (lower than Florida average)<sup>3</sup>



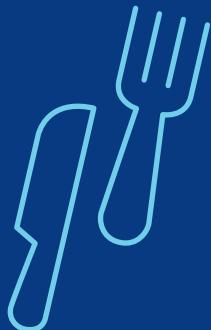
**13%**

Residents who are low income and don't live close to a grocery store (higher than Florida average)<sup>4</sup>



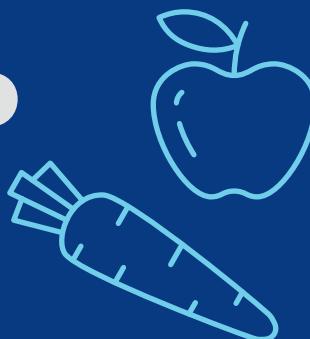
**15%**

Residents who report being food insecure<sup>5</sup>



**79%**

Residents who don't eat enough fruits and vegetables every day<sup>6</sup>



<sup>1</sup>CDC PLACES, 2022.

<sup>2</sup>CDC PLACES, 2022.

<sup>3</sup>County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2025.

<sup>4</sup>County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2025.

<sup>5</sup>FL Health CHARTS, 2023. Food Insecurity Rates.

<sup>6</sup>All4HealthFL Community Health Needs Assessment Survey, 2025.

# Exercise, Nutrition and Weight

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## Impact Objectives

- Continue providing a two-to-three-day supply of nonperishable food upon discharge to self-identified food insecure patients using the two-question, validated United States Department of Agriculture Food Insecurity screener.
- Through partnership with Feeding Tampa Bay, maintain seven school-based food pantries across Polk County, providing access to food for students and their families and additional services such as health screenings and education.
- Operate a community food clinic that offers high-quality, nutritionally dense foods along with wraparound services that promote whole health.
- Provide funding for a position at Feeding Tampa Bay to coordinate health care partnerships and their associated programming.
- Extend the Community Health team's impactful community partnerships across Polk County, offering prevention-based screening and education services.
- Partner with local free and reduced-cost clinics to offer one-on-one health coaching for prediabetic or diabetic patients to improve their chronic disease management.
- Grow partnership with The Mission of Winter Haven to increase access to a day shelter, providing hot meals, a food pantry, case management services, showers and hygiene supplies and other basic needs for individuals who are unhoused or experiencing financial hardship.
- Continue partnership with the YMCA, offering a variety of health and wellness programming including their Diabetes Prevention Program and EnhanceFitness programs.
- Continue to support the BayCare Kids Wellness and Safety team's work that provides education and programs focused on nutrition and physical activity.\*

\*Indicates pediatric-specific impact objective



## Hospital Information

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### **Bartow Regional Medical Center**

*Bartow, Florida*

Bartow Regional Medical Center, part of BayCare, is a 72-bed acute care hospital serving South Lakeland, Bartow, Fort Meade, Mulberry, rural south Polk County and northern Hardee County. The hospital is equipped with four surgery suites and two gastroenterology suites. The emergency services department is staffed with board-certified emergency physicians and specially trained nurses, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to treat all types of emergency situations. The hospital is located at 2200 Osprey Boulevard in Bartow, Florida. For more information: [BayCare.org/BRMC](http://BayCare.org/BRMC)



### **Winter Haven Hospital**

*Winter Haven, Florida*

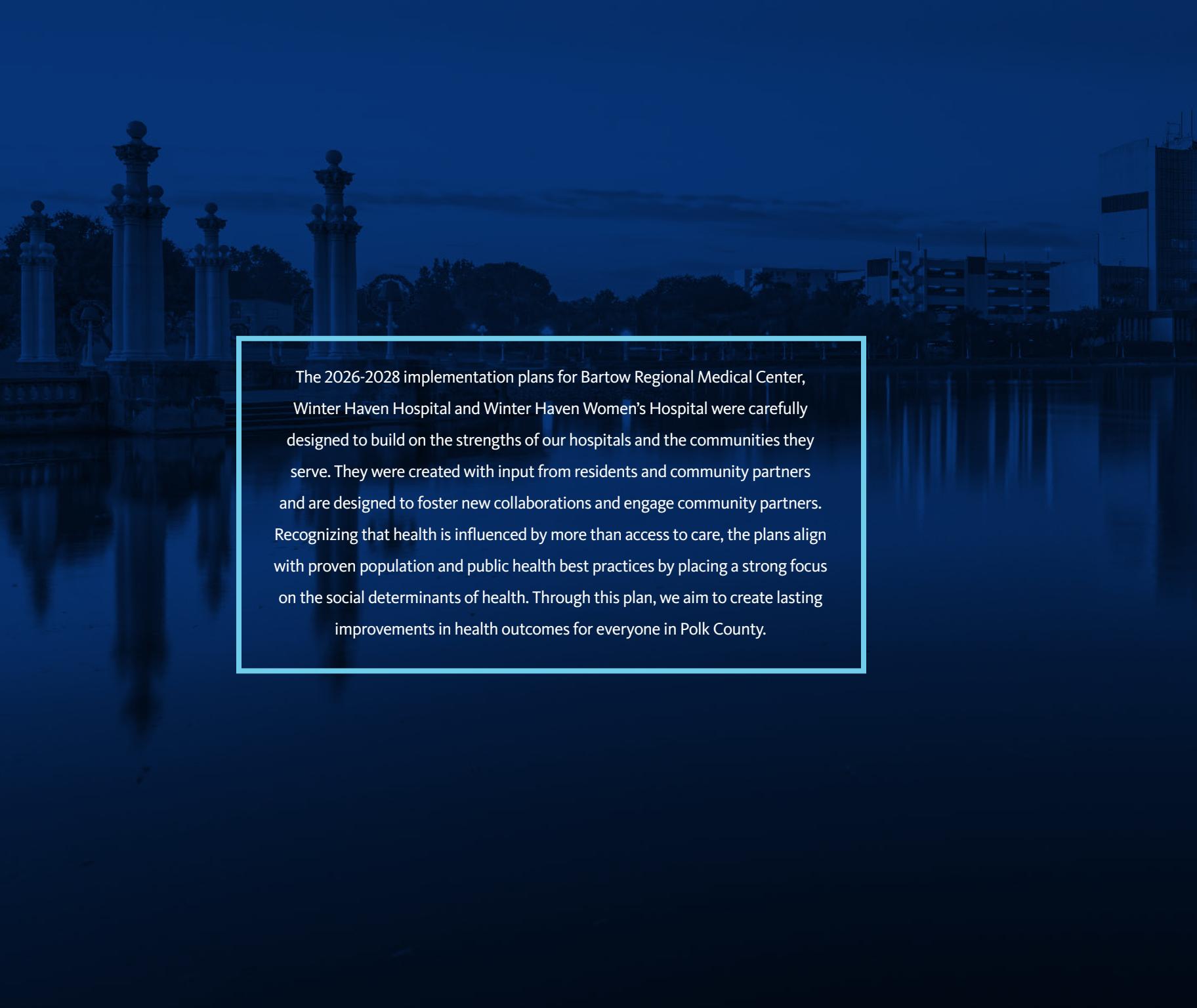
Founded in 1926, Winter Haven Hospital has an outstanding reputation for superior, patient-centered care. The 447-bed hospital concentrates on treatment of heart disease, cancer, stroke and behavioral health. The hospital also provides emergency care, outpatient diabetes education, endoscopy services, neurological, orthopedic and inpatient rehabilitation, outpatient surgery and imaging services. Part of BayCare, the hospital is located at 200 Avenue F Northeast in Winter Haven, Florida. For more information: [BayCare.org/WHH](http://BayCare.org/WHH)



### **Winter Haven Women's Hospital**

*Winter Haven, Florida*

Built in 1987, Winter Haven Women's Hospital is a 61-bed facility dedicated to the unique needs of women and newborns. The hospital, part of BayCare, provides on-site obstetric services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and has a level II neonatal intensive care unit, education classes, an outpatient surgery center and a breast and imaging center. The hospital is located at 101 Avenue O Southeast in Winter Haven, Florida. For more information: [BayCare.org/WWH](http://BayCare.org/WWH)



The 2026-2028 implementation plans for Bartow Regional Medical Center, Winter Haven Hospital and Winter Haven Women's Hospital were carefully designed to build on the strengths of our hospitals and the communities they serve. They were created with input from residents and community partners and are designed to foster new collaborations and engage community partners. Recognizing that health is influenced by more than access to care, the plans align with proven population and public health best practices by placing a strong focus on the social determinants of health. Through this plan, we aim to create lasting improvements in health outcomes for everyone in Polk County.



