

Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast

Implementation Strategy for the 2024 CHNA Okaloosa and Walton counties, Florida



Ascension

The purpose of this Implementation Strategy (IS) is to describe how the hospital plans to address prioritized health needs from its current Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The significant health needs the hospital does not intend to address are identified, and a rationale is provided. Special attention has been given to the needs of individuals and communities at increased risk for poor health outcomes or experiencing social factors that place them at risk.

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The Ascension Florida Board of Directors approved the 2024 IS on August 19, 2025 (2024 tax year) and applies to the following three-year cycle: July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2028. This report, as well as the previous report, can be found on our public website.

We value the community's voice and welcome feedback on this report. Please visit our public website (<https://healthcare.ascension.org/chna>) to submit your comments.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| About Ascension | 4 |
| About Ascension Florida | 4 |
| About Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast | 5 |
| Overview of the Implementation Strategy | 6 |
| Needs Prioritization | 6 |
| Needs That Will Be Addressed | 6 |
| Needs That Will Not Be Addressed | 7 |
| Written Comments | 8 |
| Approval and Adoption of the IS by Ascension Florida Board of Directors | 8 |
| Action Plans | 9 |

Introduction

As one of the leading non-profit and Catholic health systems in the United States, Ascension is committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to impoverished and vulnerable persons.

About Ascension

Ascension is one of the nation's leading non-profit and Catholic health systems, with a Mission of delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to those most vulnerable. In FY2024, Ascension provided \$2.1 billion in care of persons living in poverty and other community benefit programs. Across 16 states and the District of Columbia, Ascension's network encompasses approximately 99,000 associates, 23,000 aligned providers, 94 wholly owned or consolidated hospitals, and ownership interests in 27 additional hospitals through partnerships. Ascension also operates 30 senior living facilities and a variety of other care sites offering a range of healthcare services.

Ascension's Mission provides a strong framework and guidance for the work done to meet the needs of communities across the US. It is foundational to transform healthcare and express priorities when providing care and services, particularly to those most in need.

Mission: Rooted in the loving ministry of Jesus as healer, we commit ourselves to serving all persons with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable. Our Catholic health ministry is dedicated to spiritually-centered, holistic care which sustains and improves the health of individuals and communities. We are advocates for a compassionate and just society through our actions and our words.

For more information about Ascension, visit <https://www.ascension.org/>.

About Ascension Florida

In Northwest Florida, Ascension operates Ascension Sacred Heart Pensacola, The Studer Family Children's Hospital at Ascension Sacred Heart, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, Ascension Sacred Heart Bay and Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf. In Northeast Florida, Ascension operates Ascension St. Vincent's Riverside, Ascension St. Vincent's Southside, Ascension St. Vincent's Clay County and Ascension St. Vincent's St. Johns County. In addition to operating nine hospitals, Ascension Florida also has more than 190 other sites of care and employs more than 12,000 associates throughout the state.

About Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast

As a Ministry of the Catholic Church, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast is a non-profit hospital providing medical care to Okaloosa and Walton counties. Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast operates one hospital campus, 26 related healthcare facilities, and employs more than 45 primary and specialty care clinicians.

Serving Florida since 2003, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast is continuing the long and valued tradition of responding to the health needs of the people in our community, following in the footsteps of legacy. Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast was built through a grassroots community effort and with land donated by the St. Joe Community Foundation. The community continues to support the hospital and its expansions, including adding a Level II NICU in 2020, purchasing an advanced CT machine, and improving cardiovascular care, including pulse-field ablation.

For more information about Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, visit ascension.org/EmeraldCoastFL

Overview of the Implementation Strategy

Needs Prioritization


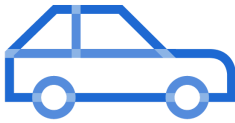
Included in Code Section 501(r)(3) is the requirement that hospitals must provide a description of the process and criteria used to determine the most significant health needs of the community identified through the CHNA, along with a description of the process and criteria used to determine the prioritized needs to be addressed by the hospital. Accordingly, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast used a phased prioritization approach to identify the needs of Okaloosa and Walton counties. The first step was to determine the broader set of identified needs. The CHNA assessment narrowed identified needs to a group of significant needs determined most crucial for community stakeholders to address.

After completing the CHNA assessment, significant needs were further narrowed down to prioritized needs that the hospital will address within the IS. To arrive at the prioritized needs, members from Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast leadership and Community Benefit teams reviewed the findings from the 2024 CHNA, assessed community interest and local momentum, and reflected on the criteria outlined below (listed alphabetically). This approach ensured that the selected priorities reflect both data-informed insights and the values of the communities served.

- Ability to leverage existing organizational assets, resources, and areas of expertise
- Alignment with the hospital's mission, values, and strategic priorities
- Potential to positively impact a significant number of people, with attention to those who are most vulnerable

Needs That Will Be Addressed

Following the completion of the current CHNA, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast has selected the prioritized needs outlined below for its 2024 IS. Ascension has defined "prioritized needs" as the significant needs that the hospital has prioritized to address through the three-year CHNA cycle.

| Prioritized Need | Rationale |
|--|---|
| Access to Care  | <p>This need was selected because the ability to obtain timely, affordable, and quality healthcare is essential to improving physical, mental, and social well-being. When individuals face barriers to care, such as cost or limited availability of services, they are more likely to delay diagnosis, miss preventive services, and experience worsening of chronic conditions, which can lead to poorer health outcomes and increased healthcare costs.</p> |
| Transportation  | <p>This need was selected because transportation plays a critical role in an individual's ability to access health care and other essential services. When reliable transportation is lacking, patients may miss medical appointments, delay preventive care, or forgo treatment altogether. These barriers can contribute to poorer health outcomes, particularly for those managing chronic conditions or living in more remote or underserved areas.</p> |

Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast understands the importance of all the community's health needs. It is committed to playing an active role in improving the health of the people in the communities it serves. For this implementation strategy, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast has focused its efforts on the above priorities.

Needs That Will Not Be Addressed

Based on the prioritization process and criteria, the significant (health) needs identified through the CHNA that Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast does not plan to address at this time include:

- **Affordable housing** - This need was not selected because addressing the key drivers of affordable housing falls within the core expertise of several dedicated community organizations that are actively engaged in this work.
- **Childcare** - This need was not selected because a number of organizations and coalitions in the community are already leading efforts to address childcare challenges.
- **Chronic Disease and Obesity** - This need was not selected because many of the contributors, or root causes, of chronic disease and obesity are already being addressed by several community-based organizations within the area. Additionally, numerous factors will also be addressed secondarily through efforts described in the action plans below. Furthermore, the hospital already provides ongoing support in this area through the MyGULFCare program, which offers chronic disease management resources, education, and services to the community.
- **Mental Health and Substance Use** - This need was not selected because a number of specialized organizations in the community are already leading efforts to expand access to mental health services.

While these needs are not the focus of this Implementation Strategy, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast may consider investing resources in these areas as appropriate, depending on opportunities to leverage organizational assets in partnership with local communities and organizations. Also, this report only encompasses a partial inventory of everything Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast does to support health within the community.

To find a list of resources for each need not being addressed, please refer to the Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast's 2024 CHNA: <https://healthcare.ascension.org/CHNA>.

Written Comments

This IS has been made available to the public and is open for public comment. Questions or comments about this IS can be submitted via the website: <https://healthcare.ascension.org/chna>.

Approval and Adoption of the IS by Ascension Florida Board of Directors

To ensure the Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast's efforts meet the needs of the community and have a lasting and meaningful impact, the 2024 IS was presented and adopted by the Ascension Florida Board of Directors on August 19, 2025. Although an authorized body of the hospital must adopt the IS to be compliant with the provisions of the Affordable Care Act, adoption of the IS also demonstrates that the board is aware of the IS, endorses the priorities identified, and supports the action plans that have been developed to address prioritized needs.

Action Plans

The IS below is based on prioritized needs from the hospital's most recent CHNA. These action plans represent where the hospital will focus its community efforts over the next three years.

| PRIORITIZED NEED #1: ACCESS TO CARE | |
|--|--|
| HOSPITAL NAME: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast | |
| STRATEGY #1.1: Engage in community-based councils, associations, and other collaborative forums | |
| OBJECTIVE: By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast will strengthen its role in collective efforts to improve access to care and drive measurable improvements in overall community health outcomes. | |
| COLLABORATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) | |
| RESOURCES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast - Allocated staff time; Funds to support participation, if applicable Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) - Time | |
| TACTICS | OWNER |
| Expand current or initiate new community partnerships with community-based organizations, particularly those focused on addressing rural access and affordability | Community Benefit, Hospital leadership, Mission |
| Strengthen relationships with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and other clinics providing care to under and or uninsured community members | Community Benefit, Foundation, Hospital leadership, Mission, Service Lines, Strategy |
| Participate in county-based Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) efforts | Community Benefit, Hospital leadership |
| ANTICIPATED IMPACT | |
| The anticipated impact of these tactics is stronger, trust-based relationships with community organizations that improve access to care. These partnerships will help address social and structural barriers to health, elevate community voice, and promote shared accountability for the health of the community. Over time, this approach will support more coordinated systems, aligned resources, and improved health outcomes. | |

| PRIORITIZED NEED #1: ACCESS TO CARE | |
|--|---|
| HOSPITAL NAME: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast | |
| STRATEGY #1.2: Expand hospital programs, services, and infrastructure | |
| OBJECTIVE: By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast will expand access to timely, affordable, and appropriate care by strengthening service delivery, expanding capacity, and removing barriers to care. | |
| COLLABORATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) | |
| RESOURCES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast - Allocated staff time; Funds to support participation, if applicable Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time, shared programming, and funding resources Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) - Time | |
| TACTICS | OWNER |
| Offer community-based clinics, health screenings, and other localized health services | Community Outreach |
| Implement transformation strategies that improve access for Medicaid and Uninsured patients | Community Impact, Hospital leadership |
| Implement a Maternal Health Patient Navigation program | ACEN, Community Impact, Women's Health |
| Connect Emergency Department patients without a primary care provider to follow-up care through the ED Concierge program | ACEN, Emergency Department, Care Continuity |
| Assess opportunities to increase access to medication, including expansion of the Dispensary of Hope program | Pharmacy Department |
| Assess opportunities to expand access points | ACEN, Hospital leadership, Strategy |
| ANTICIPATED IMPACT | |
| The anticipated impact of these actions is that more individuals will be able to access the care they need, when and where they need it. Through expanded capacity and more coordinated services, patients will experience fewer barriers and improved connections to care. | |

| PRIORITIZED NEED #1: ACCESS TO CARE | |
|--|--|
| HOSPITAL NAME: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast | |
| STRATEGY #1.3: Invest in community-based programs and initiatives | |
| OBJECTIVE: By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast will improve access to care and community health outcomes through strategic investments in trusted nonprofit partners and collaborative community programs. | |
| COLLABORATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) | |
| RESOURCES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast - Allocated staff time; Funds to support investments Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated funding resources, if applicable Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) - Time | |
| TACTICS | OWNER |
| Expand reach and impact through new or increased community investments | Community Investment Council, Hospital leadership |
| Implement Ascension's national Community Investment Guidelines | Community Benefit, Community Investment Council, Hospital leadership |
| ANTICIPATED IMPACT | |
| The anticipated impact of these tactics is expanded community capacity to connect and provide individuals with needed healthcare services and support. Investments in nonprofit organizations and programs will help reduce barriers such as transportation and cost, leading to improved access to care and better health outcomes. | |

| PRIORITIZED NEED #2: TRANSPORTATION | |
|---|--|
| HOSPITAL NAME: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast | |
| STRATEGY #2.1: Engage in community-based councils, associations, and other collaborative forums | |
| OBJECTIVE: By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast will strengthen its role in collective efforts that improve access to accessible transportation for individuals facing barriers to care and essential services. | |
| COLLABORATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) | |
| RESOURCES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast - Allocated staff time; Funds to support participation, if applicable Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) - Time | |
| TACTICS | OWNER |
| Expand community partnerships with organizations focused on addressing transportation barriers | Community Benefit, Hospital leadership |
| Participate in county-based Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) efforts | Community Benefit, Hospital leadership |
| ANTICIPATED IMPACT | |
| The anticipated impact of these tactics is stronger, trust-based relationships with community organizations working to reduce transportation barriers and improve health outcomes. These partnerships will help address root causes of transportation challenges, elevate community voice, and promote shared responsibility for improving local transportation systems. Over time, this approach will support more coordinated efforts, better-aligned resources, and improved transportation options for the community. | |

| PRIORITIZED NEED #2: TRANSPORTATION | |
|---|---|
| HOSPITAL NAME: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast | |
| STRATEGY #2.2: Expand hospital programs, services, and infrastructure | |
| OBJECTIVE: By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast will improve access to care and community resources by expanding efforts that address transportation barriers for patients, associates, and underserved populations. | |
| COLLABORATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) | |
| RESOURCES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast - Allocated staff time; Funds to support participation, if applicable Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time, shared programming and funding resources Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) - Time | |
| TACTIC | OWNER |
| Provide transportation resources for eligible patients to get to medical appointments | MyGulfCare, Case Management |
| Promote broader awareness and use of the Neighborhood Resources platform among patients, associates, and community | ACEN, Case Management, Community Impact |
| Explore opportunities to ease transportation challenges for associates | Community Benefit, Hospital leadership, Human Resources, Talent Acquisition |
| ANTICIPATED IMPACT | |
| The anticipated impact of these tactics is improved access to health care and community services by reducing transportation barriers for patients and associates. By enhancing transportation-related efforts, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast aims to support more consistent and timely use of needed services, contributing to better overall health and well-being. | |

| PRIORITIZED NEED #2: TRANSPORTATION | |
|--|--|
| HOSPITAL NAME: Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast | |
| STRATEGY #2.3: Invest in community-based programs and initiatives | |
| OBJECTIVE: By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast will help reduce transportation barriers by strategically investing in trusted nonprofit partners and community-based programs. | |
| COLLABORATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) | |
| RESOURCES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast - Allocated staff time; Funds to support investments, if applicable Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time, shared programming, and funding resources Collaborators: Community-based organization (to be determined) - Time | |
| TACTICS | OWNER |
| Expand reach and impact through new or increased community investments | Community Investment Council, Hospital leadership |
| Implement Ascension's national Community Investment Guidelines | Community Benefit, Community Investment Council, Hospital leadership |
| ANTICIPATED IMPACT | |
| The anticipated impact of these tactics is expanded community capacity to address transportation barriers that limit access to health care and essential services for community members. Strategic investments in trusted nonprofit partners and community-based programs will help reduce challenges related to cost, distance, and availability, and support improved health outcomes. | |