

# Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf

**Implementation Strategy for the 2024 CHNA  
Gulf and Franklin 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.**

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## 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 Gulf**

As a Ministry of the Catholic Church, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf is a non-profit hospital providing medical care to Gulf and Franklin counties. Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf operates one hospital campus, seven related healthcare facilities, and employs more than 30 primary and specialty care clinicians.

Serving Florida since 2010, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf 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. The hospital was built after the closure of the small community hospital in Gulf County through a collaboration between the St. Joe Community Foundation and Sacred Heart. The hospital offers 24 hour emergency care, advanced imaging, general surgery, and speciality and primary care access all at one campus with additional primary care clinics in Apalachicola and Wewahitchka.

For more information about Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf, visit [ascension.org/GulfFL](https://ascension.org/GulfFL)

## 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 Gulf used a phased prioritization approach to identify the needs of Gulf and Franklin 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 Gulf 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 Gulf 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
<b>Access to Care</b> 	<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>
<b>Chronic Disease and Prevention</b> 	<p>This need was selected because chronic diseases are among the most pressing health concerns in Gulf and Franklin counties. Although often preventable, these conditions remain widespread due to factors such as physical inactivity, insufficient health education about risk factors and preventive measures, and stigma or cultural attitudes toward certain preventive practices (e.g. health screenings or lifestyle changes). Without regular preventive care and effective disease management, individuals face higher risks of complications, worse health outcomes, and rising healthcare costs.</p>

Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf 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 IS, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf 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 Gulf 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.
- **Mental health and substance abuse**- 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.
- **Socioeconomic challenges** - This need was not selected because many of the key drivers, or root causes, of these challenges 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.
- **Transportation** - This need was not selected because several community partners and local agencies are already leading efforts to improve transportation access, including expanding transit routes and addressing service gaps.

While these needs are not the focus of this IS, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf 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 Gulf 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 Gulf'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 Gulf'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	
<b>HOSPITAL NAME:</b> Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf	
<b>STRATEGY #1.1:</b> Engage in community-based councils, associations, and other collaborative forums	
<b>OBJECTIVE:</b> By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf will strengthen its role in collective efforts to improve access to care and drive measurable improvements in overall community health outcomes.	
<b>COLLABORATORS:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based)</li> <li>Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined)</li> </ul>	
<b>RESOURCES:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf - Allocated staff time; Funds to support participation, if applicable</li> <li>Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time</li> <li>Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined) - Time</li> </ul>	
TACTICS	OWNER
Expand current, or initiate new, community partnerships with community-based organizations, particularly those focused barriers related to 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.	

<b>PRIORITIZED NEED #1: ACCESS TO CARE</b>	
<b>HOSPITAL NAME:</b> Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf	
<b>STRATEGY #1.2:</b> Expand hospital programs, services, and infrastructure	
<b>OBJECTIVE:</b> By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf will expand access to timely, affordable, and appropriate care by strengthening service delivery, expanding capacity, and removing barriers to care.	
<b>COLLABORATORS:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based)</li> <li>Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined)</li> </ul>	
<b>RESOURCES:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf - Allocated staff time; Funds to support participation, if applicable</li> <li>Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time, shared programming and funding resources</li> <li>Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined) - Time</li> </ul>	
<b>TACTICS</b>	<b>OWNER</b>
Offer community-based clinics, health screenings, and other localized health services	Community Outreach, Mission
Implement transformation strategies that improve access for Medicaid and Uninsured patients	Community Impact, Hospital leadership
Assess opportunities to expand access points	ACEN, Hospital leadership, Strategy
<b>ANTICIPATED IMPACT</b>	
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, shorter wait times, and improved connections to preventive, acute, and specialty care.	

<b>PRIORITIZED NEED #1: ACCESS TO CARE</b>	
<b>HOSPITAL NAME:</b> Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf	
<b>STRATEGY #1.3:</b> Invest in community-based programs and initiatives	
<b>OBJECTIVE:</b> By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf will improve access to care and community health outcomes through strategic investments in trusted nonprofit partners and collaborative community programs.	
<b>COLLABORATORS:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based)</li> <li>Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined)</li> </ul>	
<b>RESOURCES:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf - Allocated staff time; Funds to support investments, if applicable</li> <li>Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time, shared programming and funding resources</li> <li>Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined) - Time</li> </ul>	
<b>TACTICS</b>	<b>OWNER</b>
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
<b>ANTICIPATED IMPACT</b>	
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: CHRONIC DISEASE AND PREVENTION

**HOSPITAL NAME:** Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf

**STRATEGY #2.1:** Engage in community-based councils, associations, and other collaborative forums

**OBJECTIVE:** By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf will strengthen its role in collective efforts to reduce chronic disease and increase prevention-based education through coordinated, community-driven initiatives.

**COLLABORATORS:**

- Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based)
- Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined)

**RESOURCES:**

- Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf - 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 organizations (to be determined) - Time

TACTICS	OWNER
Expand community partnerships with organizations focused on chronic disease management and prevention education	Community Benefit, Hospital leadership, Mission
Participate in county-based Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) efforts	Community Benefit, Hospital leadership

### ANTICIPATED IMPACT

The anticipated impact of these tactics is improved coordination and alignment of community efforts to reduce the burden of chronic disease, increase access to prevention-focused education and resources, and enhance overall health outcomes through sustained, collaborative engagement.

## PRIORITIZED NEED #2: CHRONIC DISEASE AND PREVENTION

**HOSPITAL NAME:** Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf

**STRATEGY #2.2:** Expand hospital programs, services, and infrastructure

**OBJECTIVE:** By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf will expand its capacity to support chronic disease prevention and management by increasing access to education, resources, and care that promote healthy lifestyles for patients, associates, and the broader community.

**COLLABORATORS:**

- Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based)
- Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined)

**RESOURCES:**

- Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf - 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 organizations (to be determined) - Time

TACTIC	OWNER
Provide education and assistance to help residents manage their chronic health conditions	MyGULF Care
Promote broader awareness and use of the Neighborhood Resources platform among patients, associates, and community	ACEN, Case Management, Community Impact
Collaborate with internal teams to ensure (eligible) associates are aware of and able to benefit from the Fresh Funds foods program	Associate Engagement Committee, Hospital leadership, Human Resources
Explore partnerships and initiatives to enhance on-campus access to fresh and healthy foods	Community Benefit, Hospital leadership, TouchPoint

### ANTICIPATED IMPACT

The anticipated impact of these tactics is increased access to preventive care, education, and supportive resources that empower individuals to manage risk factors, adopt healthier lifestyles, and reduce the incidence and complications of chronic disease across the community.

<b>PRIORITIZED NEED #2: CHRONIC DISEASE AND PREVENTION</b>	
<b>HOSPITAL NAME:</b> Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf	
<b>STRATEGY #2.3:</b> Invest in community-based programs and initiatives	
<b>OBJECTIVE:</b> By June 30, 2028, Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf will help chronic disease and promote prevention awareness by strategically investing in trusted nonprofit partners and community-based programs.	
<b>COLLABORATORS:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based)</li> <li>Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined)</li> </ul>	
<b>RESOURCES:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ascension Sacred Heart Gulf - Allocated staff time; Funds to support investments, if applicable</li> <li>Other Ascension hospital(s): Ascension Sacred Heart hospitals (Northwest Florida-based) - Allocated staff time, shared programming and funding resources</li> <li>Collaborators: Community-based organizations (to be determined) - Time</li> </ul>	
<b>TACTICS</b>	<b>OWNER</b>
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
<b>ANTICIPATED IMPACT</b>	
The anticipated impact of these tactics is strengthened community capacity to prevent and manage chronic disease through increased support for trusted organizations and initiatives that deliver education, outreach, and resources to those at greatest risk.	