
POLK COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT

June 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About this Report

Every five years, the Florida Department of Health in Polk County gathers community partners from the local public health system to conduct a community health assessment (CHA). The 2025 Polk County CHA is the result of an 18-month-long data collection and analysis process for the purpose of examining the current health status and quality of life among Polk County residents. The ultimate goal of a CHA is to be able to identify and prioritize the health needs and issues most impacting health and quality of life so that community health improvement strategies may be implemented to address them. The final report provides a compilation of opinions from local residents, input from members of the local public health system, and statistical data gathered from multiple sources. For the complete 2025 CHA report, visit: <https://polkvision.com/what-we-do/reports/>

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection, Analysis and Prioritization Process

Methods used to collect data for the CHA included a review of available secondary data (e.g., vital statistics, emergency department and hospitalization data), a community health survey, a community partner survey, and a series of key stakeholder focus groups. The data collected was then organized into the following 10 health topics (listed below in alphabetical order):

- Access to Health Services
- Aging Adult Health
- Behavioral Health
- Child & Adolescent Health
- Chronic Disease
- Exercise, Nutrition, and Weight
- Immunization and Infectious Disease
- Injury Prevention and Safety
- Maternal and Infant Health
- Oral Health

These 10 topics were then subjected to a prioritization process using a ranking scale of 1-10 for *scope and severity*, and *ability to impact*. The table below (Figure 1) shows the final ranking of the health topics:

Figure 1. 2025 Polk County Prioritization Exercise Final Results

Health Topic	Rank
Access to Health Services	#1
Behavioral Health	#2
Chronic Disease	#3
Child and Adolescent Health	#4
Aging Adult Health	#5
Exercise, Nutrition, and Weight	#6
Maternal and Infant Health	#7
Immunization and Infectious Disease	#8
Injury Prevention and Safety	#9
Oral Health	#10

POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS OF POLK COUNTY

This section highlights some key demographical shifts in the population of Polk County, since the previous (2020) CHA cycle.

Based on 2024 population estimates, most Polk County residents reside in various areas of unincorporated Polk County, followed by the cities of Lakeland, Winter Haven, and Haines City. According to The Florida Legislature, the largest population growth in Polk between 2020-2024 occurred in unincorporated Polk County, followed by the cities of Haines City, Lakeland, and Winter Haven (Office of Economic and Demographic Research). Out of Florida's 67 counties, Polk ranks #1 for largest increase in new residents between 2020-2024 with a population increase of 101,044 residents (University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research).

Age and Gender: A larger proportion of the population in Polk County is younger than 25 years of age compared to the State of Florida. Conversely, the State of Florida has a larger proportion of population that is 65+ years of age (Florida Legislature, 2023). Between 2018-2023, the largest growth in the population of Polk occurred among the 25-44 age group, followed by smaller growths within the 15-24 and 75+ age groups. About 51% of the population in Polk identifies as female.

Race: The racial makeup of Polk County is similar to that of the State of Florida with about 77% of the population identifying as White, 17% Black, and 6% Other. Between 2018-2023, the proportion of the population in Polk identifying as White slightly decreased while the proportion of the population identifying as Black or Other slightly increased (Florida Legislature, Office of Economic and Demographic Research).

Ethnicity: Compared to the State of Florida, the Hispanic population in Polk grew substantially between 2018-2023. Although Florida previously had a larger Hispanic population, the proportion of population in Polk that is Hispanic began to surpass that of Florida in 2022 and continued to increase into 2023 (Florida Legislature, Office of Economic and Demographic Research).

Language: In Polk County, 1 in every 10 residents report speaking English less than "very well" (US Census Bureau American Community Survey – 5-year estimates, 2023), suggesting a need for information and resources be made available in other languages. The languages most mentioned during the Polk CHA stakeholder focus groups as needing translation services were Haitian-Creole and Spanish, including some Mexican indigenous languages.

Education: Polk County continues to have fewer residents ages 25+ years that have a post-secondary educational degree than the State of Florida. However, post-secondary educational degree attainment between 2018-2023 increased across both Polk County and the State of Florida, decreasing the proportion of residents that have only a high school diploma or less education (US Census Bureau American Community Survey – 5-year estimates, 2023).

Employment and Industry: The proportion of the civilian labor force (i.e., non-institutionalized civilians ages 16+ years) that is employed increased between 2018 and 2023 across both Polk County and the State of Florida. While the employed civilian labor force in Polk increased at a larger rate than the State, Florida continues to have a slightly higher rate of the civilian labor force that is employed than Polk.

Currently, the top three industries in Polk are: (1.) educational services, and health care and social assistance; (2.) retail trade; and (3.) arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services (2023).

The largest employers in Polk are Publix Super Markets, followed by the Polk County School Board, Lakeland Regional Health, Walmart, and Amazon.

Income and Poverty: Household incomes increased in Polk between 2018 and 2023 with more households earning over \$50,000 a year and fewer households earning less than \$50,000. However, Polk County residents continue to make less money than residents across the State of Florida. Relatedly, Polk has a higher proportion of residents that fall below the poverty threshold than all residents across Florida.

Health Insurance: Health insurance coverage among the civilian, non-institutionalized population in Polk is slightly lower than Florida. Among residents with health insurance coverage, Polk has a larger proportion of the population that is covered by public insurance (e.g., Medicare/Medicaid) while Florida has a larger proportion covered by private insurance (e.g., employer-based insurance).

LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH

Four of the top five leading causes of death in Polk County are chronic diseases (US Census Bureau American Community Survey – 1-year estimates, 2023), which are largely caused by poor health habits and lifestyle choices, such as poor diet, lack of exercise, tobacco use, and excessive alcohol consumption (McKeown, 2009).

In 2023, the top 5 leading causes of death in Polk County were:

1. Cancer
2. Heart disease
3. Stroke
4. Unintentional Injury
5. Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (CLRD).

ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

From the 2025 Polk CHA prioritization process, *Access to Health Services* was identified as the #1 most important priority health issue impacting health and quality of life for Polk County residents.

Most respondents to the Polk CHA Community Health Survey (2024) reported having problems with accessing health care services in their community. When asked if there was a time within the past 12 months when some form of health-related care was needed, but not received, the number one type of health care that was needed and not received was dental care, followed by medical, mental health, and prenatal care.

The top reasons why dental care was not received include:

- they were unable to afford to pay for care
- they did not have insurance to cover dental care
- they were unable to schedule an appointment when needed
- they were unable to find a dentist who takes their insurance

The top reasons why medical care was not received include:

- they were unable to afford to pay for care
- they were unable to schedule an appointment when needed
- they did not have insurance to cover medical care

The top reasons why mental health care was not received include:

- they did not have insurance to cover mental health care
- they were unable to afford to pay for care
- they were unable to find a doctor/counselor who takes their insurance
- they were unable to schedule an appointment when needed
- fear of judgement from family or community

The top reasons why prenatal care was not received include:

- they did not have insurance to cover pregnancy care
- they did not know they were pregnant
- they were unable to schedule an appointment when needed
- they were unable to find a doctor who takes their insurance
- they were unable to afford to pay for care

Health Care Workforce: Polk County is designated as a Health Care Professional Shortage Area for primary care, mental health, and dental health by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Provider rates in Polk County are lower than the State for:

- Dentists
- Dental hygienists
- Physicians
- OB/GYNs
- Pediatricians
- Physician Assistants (PA)
- Pharmacists
- Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA)
- Registered Nurses (RN)
- Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN)
- Licensed Behavioral/Mental Health Professionals
- Licensed Clinical Social Workers
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists
- Licensed Mental Health Counselors
- Licensed Psychologists
- Paramedics
- Emergency Medical Technicians (FDOH Division of Quality Insurance).

Polk County is in the 3rd quartile (worst-performing half) of all counties in the State for the number of physicians per 10,000 population (FDOH Physician Workforce Annual Report, 2023).

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

From the 2025 Polk CHA prioritization process, *Behavioral Health* was identified as the #2 most important priority health issue impacting health and quality of life for Polk County residents.

Mental Health: Although rates of suicide deaths are slightly lower in Polk County compared to statewide (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23), rates in Polk are higher than the State for the following:

- Emergency department (ED) visits from mental disorders, including ED visits from mental disorders among youth ages 0-17 years (Florida AHCA, 2021-23)
- Emergency department visits & hospitalizations from non-fatal self-harm injuries, including hospitalizations from non-fatal self-harm injuries among youth ages 12-18 years and young adults ages 19-21 years (Florida AHCA, 2021-23)
- High school students who have experienced 4+ ACEs (FYSAS, 2022)
- Female students who seriously considered suicide (FYSAS, 2024)
- Total Involuntary Examinations (Baker Acts) (DCF Baker Act Dashboard, 2021-22).

Substance Use: Key data highlights regarding substance use in Polk County include the following:

Tobacco

- Rates of smoking cigarettes, cigars, and using smokeless tobacco among youth has decreased over time and are lower among youth in Polk than across the State (FYTS, 2024).
- The rate of vaping nicotine among youth is higher in Polk than across the State (FYSAS, 2022).
- The rate of adult tobacco use has decreased over time in Polk but remains higher than statewide (CDC PLACES, 2022).

Alcohol

- The rate of youth alcohol use and binge drinking has decreased over time but remains higher than statewide (FYSAS, 2022).
- The rate of binge drinking among adults has increased over time in Polk but remains lower than statewide (CDC PLACES, 2022).

- Alcohol-confirmed traffic crashes and injuries in Polk have increased while fatalities have remained relatively stable over time (FDHSMV).

Marijuana

- The rate of marijuana use among youth has decreased over time but is higher in Polk than statewide (FYSAS, 2022).

Methamphetamine

- The rate of methamphetamine use among youth is lower in Polk than statewide (FYSAS, 2022) and Polk is in the 1st quartile (best performing 25% of counties in Florida) for this measure (FLHealthCHARTS, 2022).
- Since 2018, the drug most commonly found in deceased persons in Polk was methamphetamine, followed closely by fentanyl (FDLE).

Prescription Drugs

- The rate of prescription opioid use without a prescription among youth in Polk has decreased over time but remains slightly higher than the State (FYSAS, 2022).
- The rate of prescription amphetamine use without a prescription among youth in Polk is slightly higher than the State and has slightly increased over time (FYSAS, 2022).
- The number of opioid prescriptions dispensed in Polk, as well as the number of unique patients receiving and unique prescribers prescribing opioids, have all decreased over time (FDOH Prescription Drug Monitoring Program).
- Stimulant prescriptions, patients and prescribers in Polk have all increased since 2020 (FDOH Prescription Drug Monitoring Program).

Drug Overdose

- EMS responses to suspected non-fatal all drug and opioid-involved overdoses have increased in Polk over time (Florida EMSTARS).
- Emergency department visits from non-fatal all drug, opioid-involved, and heroin-involved overdoses have increased in Polk while stimulant-involved non-fatal overdose emergency department visits have decreased in Polk over time (Florida AHCA).
- Drug and opioid overdose death rates have increased in Polk and across the State of Florida over time. While the rate of opioid overdose deaths has been consistently lower in Polk than across the State, the rate of all drug overdose deaths has been higher in Polk than across the State since 2018 (FDLE).

CHRONIC DISEASE

From the 2025 Polk CHA prioritization process, *Chronic Disease* was identified as the #3 most important priority health issue impacting health and quality of life for Polk County residents.

Heart Disease: Key data highlights regarding heart disease in Polk County include the following:

- The rate of hospitalizations from coronary heart disease has decreased over time in Polk County; however, rates remain higher in Polk than the State average.
- The rate of death from coronary heart disease has decreased over time in Polk County.
- The rate of death from heart failure has increased over time in Polk County and the rate in Polk is higher than the State.

Stroke: Key data highlights regarding stroke in Polk County include the following:

- The rate of hospitalizations from stroke had previously been decreasing over time in Polk; however, the rate began to slightly increase in 2021-23.
- The rate of death from stroke had previously been increasing over time in Polk; however, the rate began to decrease in 2020-22.

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension): Key data highlights regarding hypertension in Polk County include the following:

- The rate of hospitalizations from hypertension is higher in Polk County than among the State of Florida; however, both rates have increased over time.
- The rate of death from hypertension has increased over time in Polk County.

Diabetes: Key data highlights regarding diabetes in Polk County include the following:

- The rates of emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and deaths from diabetes are higher in Polk County than across the State and have all increased over time.

Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (CLRD): Key data highlights regarding CLRD in Polk County include the following:

- The rates of hospitalizations and deaths from CLRD are higher in Polk than across the State; however, both rates have decreased over time.

Asthma: Key data highlights regarding asthma in Polk County include the following:

- The rates of emergency department visits and hospitalizations from asthma are higher in Polk than across the State; however, both rates have decreased over time.

Sources: FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics; Florida AHCA

Cancer: Key data highlights regarding various types of cancer in Polk County include the following:

Breast Cancer

- The breast cancer incidence rate is slightly higher across the State of Florida than in Polk County; however, both rates have increased over the past 10 years.
- The breast cancer death rate is slightly higher in Polk than across the State of Florida. The rate of death from breast cancer has remained relatively stable over the past 10 years in Polk County.

Cervical Cancer

- The cervical cancer incidence and death rates are higher in Polk County than across the State and have increased over the past 10 years.

Colorectal Cancer

- The colorectal cancer incidence rate is slightly higher in Polk County than the across the State of Florida but has decreased over the past 10 years.
- The colorectal cancer death rate is slightly higher in Polk County than the across the State of Florida and has remained relatively stable over the past 10 years.

Lung Cancer

- The lung cancer incidence and death rates are higher in Polk County than across the State of Florida; however, both rates have decreased over time in Polk and statewide.

Melanoma

- The rate of melanoma incidence remains higher in Polk County than across the State, and both rates have increased over time.
- The rate of deaths from melanoma became lower in Polk County than across the State in recent years; however, both rates have declined over the past 10 years. Polk County is in the 1st quartile (best performing 25% of counties in Florida) for this measure.

Prostate Cancer

- The prostate cancer incidence rate in Polk County has decreased over the last 10 years; however, the rate is slightly higher in Polk County than across the State.
- The prostate cancer death rate in Polk County is similar to that of 10 years ago and is slightly higher than the statewide rate as of recent.

Sources: FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics; Florida Cancer Data System

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH

Sociodemographic Characteristics: Compared to statewide rates, a higher percentage of children ages 0-17 years live below the federal poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, ACS, 2023) and a higher percentage of Polk County Public School students are eligible for free/reduced lunch (FDOE, 2024). Children in Polk County also have higher rates of foster care placement (2022-23) and experience abuse and sexual violence more often than children of the same age across the State of Florida (DCF, Florida Safe Families Network, 2021-23).

Social-Emotional Development: Although a higher percentage of children in Polk County participate in voluntary pre-K programs than across the State of Florida (2023), children in Polk County are less likely to be ready for school at kindergarten entry than children across the State (FDOE, 2024). Polk County is in the 4th quartile (worst performing 25% of counties in Florida) for high school graduation rates (2022-23), out-of-school suspensions (FDOE, 2021-23), and youth ages 10-17 years who have been arrested (Florida DJJ, 2021-23).

Modifiable Risks and Behaviors: Births to teens in Polk County have declined over time; however, rates are still higher in Polk than across the State (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23). Rates of HIV and bacterial STDs among youth are also higher in Polk County than across the State (FDOH Bureau of Communicable Diseases, 2021-23).

Immunizations and Infectious Disease: Polk County has higher rates of two-year-old children (2022) and Kindergarten children (2023) who are fully immunized than across the State of Florida. Polk County also has higher rates of 7th graders that are fully immunized (2023) than children of the same age across the State (FDOH Bureau of Epidemiology).

Potentially Avoidable Hospitalizations: Polk County has higher rates of asthma hospitalizations and diabetes hospitalizations among youth of all age groups than the State (Florida AHCA, 2021-23).

Emergency Department (ED) Visits: Rates of ED visits among youth – including ED visits from asthma, mental disorders, and non-fatal injuries – are higher in Polk County than across the State (Florida AHCA, 2021-23).

Cancer: Incidence of cancer among children of all age groups (0-19 years of age) is higher among Polk County children than children across the State (Florida Cancer Data System, 2019-21).

Injuries and Violence: Hospitalizations from non-fatal motor vehicle traffic-related injuries, non-fatal traumatic brain injury, near drownings, and non-fatal self-harm injuries are higher among Polk County youth than among youth across the State (Florida AHCA, 2021-23).

Mortality: Children of all ages in Polk County are more likely to die from an unintentional injury death than children across the State of Florida. The rate of unintentional injury death among Polk County children ages 0-4 is more than two times higher than the rate of unintentional injury death among children the same age across the State. Additionally, Polk County infants are approximately three times more likely to die from a traumatic brain injury than infants across the State.

Unintentional injury death is the leading cause of death in Polk County children of all ages. Mechanisms of injury vary widely by age group:

- Unintentional injury deaths due to motor vehicle accidents are most likely to impact Polk County children ages 15-19. Victims from this mechanism in this age group could be either drivers or passengers of the motor vehicle.

- Unintentional injury deaths due to suffocation are most likely to impact Polk County children under the age of 1. Most of these deaths are sleep related.
- Unintentional injury deaths due to drowning are most likely to impact Polk County children ages 1-4 (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

AGING ADULT HEALTH

Emergency Department Visits & Hospitalizations: The most common reasons that adults ages 65+ years in Polk and across Florida utilize the emergency department are unintentional injuries. These injuries are most often from a fall, a motor vehicle accident, or a poisoning.

The most common reasons that adults ages 65+ years in Polk and across Florida are hospitalized include from organic dementia, heart disease, stroke, and unintentional injuries. Unintentional injuries are most often from a fall, motor vehicle accident, or poisoning (Florida AHCA, 2023).

Mental Health: Polk County is in the 4th quartile (worst performing 25% of counties in Florida) for hospitalizations from self-harm among adults ages 65+ years and have a higher rate of these hospitalizations than adults the same age across the State (Florida AHCA, 2023).

Leading Causes of Death: The top five leading causes of death in adults ages 65+ years are: heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease, and diabetes (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2023).

EXERCISE, NUTRITION, & WEIGHT

Overweight & Obesity Among Adults: Polk has a higher percentage of obese adults than the State (CDC PLACES, 2022). Less than one-third of respondents to the Polk CHA Community Health Survey (2024) report that they eat the recommended 5 cups of fruits and vegetables every day while about one-fifth of respondents report meeting the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week.

Overweight & Obesity Among Youth: The percent of WIC children who are overweight or obese is similar in Polk County and across the State (FDOH WIC, 2023); however, middle school and high school students in Polk County are more likely to be obese than middle school and high school students statewide (FYTS, 2024). Subsequently, Polk is in the 4th quartile (worst performing 25% of counties in Florida) for high school students who are at a healthy weight, as well as the 4th quartile for middle school students and high school students who are physically active for at least 1 hour per day (FLHealthCHARTS, 2024).

Overweight & Obesity during Pregnancy: Polk County has a lower percentage of births to mothers who were at a healthy weight at the time pregnancy occurred than the State (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2023). Polk County is in the 4th quartile (worst performing 25% of counties in Florida) for this measure (FLHealthCHARTS, 2023).

Births to mothers who were obese at the time pregnancy occurred have increased over the last 10 years, and Polk County has a higher rate than the State (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2023).

Built Environment: The majority of respondents to the Polk CHA Community Health Survey (2024) agree that there are parks and recreational facilities available in their community, while about half agree that healthy food is easy to get to in Polk. However, according to the Florida Environmental Public Health Tracking System, Polk County has a lower percentage of residents that live within a ½ mile of a healthy food source, a fast-food restaurant, and an off-street trail system than the State (Florida Environmental Public Health Tracking System, 2022).

Food Security: Over 41% of respondents to the Polk CHA Community Health Survey (2024) report that they worried about whether food would run out before they got money to buy more in the past year while over one-third (34%) of respondents report that they did, in fact, run out of food within the past year and didn't have money to get more.

The rate of food insecurity in Polk County is similar to that of the State; however, the rate of child food insecurity is slightly higher in Polk County than statewide (Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, 2022).

MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH

Births: In 2023, there were 9,229 live births in Polk County, the majority being to mothers between the ages of 25-29 years (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics).

Pregnancy-related Outcomes:

Prenatal Care – The percent of Polk County women who initiate prenatal care in the first trimester of pregnancy is currently lower than the percentage across the State of Florida and has decreased over the last 5 years.

Health Insurance Coverage – Polk County has a higher percentage of births covered by Medicaid than the State of Florida. Polk County has a lower percentage of births to uninsured women than the State.

Tobacco Use – The percent of births to mothers who report smoking tobacco during pregnancy is steadily decreasing but is higher in Polk County than statewide.

Inter-pregnancy Interval – Polk County has a higher percentage of births that are spaced less than 18 months apart than the State (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Infant Health:

Birth-related Outcomes – The percentages of preterm births and babies born at a low birth weight in Polk County are equal to those of the State (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Breastfeeding: The percent of births in which breastfeeding is initiated has increased over time in Polk County but remains slightly lower than the statewide percent (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Maternal & Infant Mortality:

Maternal Mortality – The rate of maternal deaths in Polk County is similar to that of the State (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Infant Mortality – Polk County has a higher rate of infant deaths than the State (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23). According to the Circuit 10 Fetal and Infant Mortality Review (FIMR), the leading causes of infant death in Polk County are premature birth, congenital birth defects, and sleep-related deaths (2024).

Sleep-related Deaths: Death certificate reviews conducted by the Circuit 10 FIMR revealed that the second leading cause of infant death in Polk County is sleep-related death. Sleep-related deaths occur during an infant's sleep or in an infant's sleep area. These deaths include accidental strangulation, suffocation in bed, or positional asphyxia (FIMR, 2024).

IMMUNIZATIONS AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE

Vaccine-Preventable Diseases: Rates of vaccine-preventable diseases are low across both Polk County and the State of Florida; however, Polk County has a higher rate of varicella (chickenpox) than the State (FDOH Bureau of Epidemiology, 2023).

Child and Adolescent Immunizations: Rates of required childhood and adolescent immunizations are higher in Polk County than the State of Florida (FDOH Bureau of Epidemiology, 2023).

Pneumonia & Influenza: The rate of hospitalizations (Florida AHCA) and deaths (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics) from pneumonia and influenza are higher in Polk County than across the State of Florida (2023).

HIV/AIDS: Polk County continues to have a lower rate of persons diagnosed and living with HIV than the State (2023); however, the rate of AIDS diagnosis in Polk has recently surpassed that of the State (FDOH Bureau of Communicable Diseases).

Rates of death from HIV/AIDS are similar in both Polk County and the State of Florida and have decreased over time (FDOH Bureau of Communicable Diseases, 2021-23).

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs): The rate of bacterial STDs is slightly lower in Polk County than across the State of Florida; however, both rates have increased over the past several years (FDOH Bureau of Communicable Diseases, 2023).

Polk County is in the 4th quartile (worst performing 25% of counties in Florida) for chlamydia cases (FLHealthCHARTS, 2023).

Tuberculosis: The rate of tuberculosis cases is lower in Polk County than across the State of Florida (FDOH Bureau of Epidemiology, 2023).

INJURY PREVENTION AND SAFETY

The majority of respondents to the Polk CHA Community Health Survey agreed that their community is a safe place to live (2024).

Violence:

Intimate Partner Violence – Polk County has a higher rate of domestic violence offences than the State of Florida (2021-23). Polk County is ranked 8th in the State of Florida for the largest number of total domestic violence offenses (FDLE, 2023).

Sexual Violence – The rates of forcible sex offenses and rapes in Polk County are lower than the State (FDLE, 2021-23).

Crime: Respondents of the Polk CHA Community Health Survey (2024) ranked *low crime/safe neighborhoods* as the 2nd leading factor that makes a healthy community. More than one third of survey respondents do not think that crime is a problem in their community.

Polk County has lower rates of robbery and murder than the State of Florida; however, rates of motor vehicle theft are similar across both Polk and the State. On the other hand, Polk County has higher rates of larceny, burglary, and aggravated assault than the State (FDLE, 2021-23) and is in the 4th quartile (worst performing 25% of counties in Florida) for rates of burglary (FLHealthCHARTS, 2021-23).

Injuries:

Non-Fatal Injuries – Polk County has higher rates of emergency department visits from non-fatal injuries than the State in all three injury categories: assault, self-harm, and unintentional injury.

Polk County also has a higher rate of hospitalizations for self-harm injuries than the State, but lower rates of hospitalizations from assault and unintentional injury (FL AHCA, 2023).

Fatal Injuries – Of the three causes of injury-related deaths (suicide, homicide, and unintentional injury), unintentional injuries are the most common type of injury-related death in Polk County. The rate of unintentional injury deaths is higher in Polk County than statewide (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Homicide: The overall rate of homicide deaths in Polk County is lower than statewide; however, the rates of infant homicide deaths, child homicide deaths ages 1-5, and teen homicide deaths ages 12-18 are higher than the State rates (2021-23). In 2023, Polk County residents aged 25-34 years were more likely to become victims

of homicide than any other age group. The most common method of homicide is using a firearm (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Unintentional Fatal Injuries: Unintentional injuries are the 4th leading cause of death among Polk County residents. The most common unintentional fatal injuries among Polk County residents include unintentional poisonings, motor vehicle traffic crashes, falls, suffocations and drownings (FODH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Unintentional Fatal Poisonings: Unintentional poisoning deaths are the leading cause of death from unintentional injury in Polk County and include deaths from unintentional drug overdose. The rate of deaths from unintentional poisoning is lower in Polk County than statewide, however both rates have increased over the last 10 years (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Fatal Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes: Motor vehicle crashes, injuries, and deaths have continued to rise in Polk County and are the second most common cause of unintentional injury death among residents (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Unintentional Fatal Falls: The third most common cause of unintentional fatal injuries in Polk County is falls. Individuals ages 75 and older are at the highest risk of death from an unintentional fall (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Unintentional Fatal Suffocation: Polk County has a higher rate of unintentional fatal suffocation deaths than the State. The majority of unintentional suffocation deaths in Polk County occur among those under the age of 1. These are typically sleep-related deaths (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23).

Unintentional Fatal Drowning: The State of Florida ranks 4th in the nation for the most drownings. Polk County is ranked 10th of all counties in Florida for the most fatal drowning incidences in the State. Polk County residents ages 1-4 are most likely to experience a fatal drowning (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2023). Most drownings in Polk occur in a pool.

ORAL HEALTH

Key data highlights regarding oral health include the following:

- Fewer adults in Polk County had a dental visit in the past year than adults statewide (CDC PLACES, 2022).
- Rates of oral cancer incidence (Florida Cancer Data System, 2019-21) and death (FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics, 2021-23) are higher in Polk County than across the State of Florida.
- Polk County has a higher rate of emergency department visits from dental conditions than the State while the rate of hospitalizations from dental conditions is similar (Florida AHCA, 2021-23).