
POLK COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CHIP)

January 2026 – December 2030

Last updated: April 2026



Table of Contents Page

Contents

About this Document	3
Methodology	4
Key Themes Identified through the 2025 CHA Prioritization Process	7
Planning Summary	8
CHIP Outline	11
Priority 1: Access to Health Services	13
Priority 2: Behavioral Health	18
Priority 3: Chronic Disease	23
Priority 4: Injury Prevention and Safety	30
Community Partners	35

About this Document

A Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is a long-term, systematic effort to address public health problems based on the results of a community health assessment (CHA).

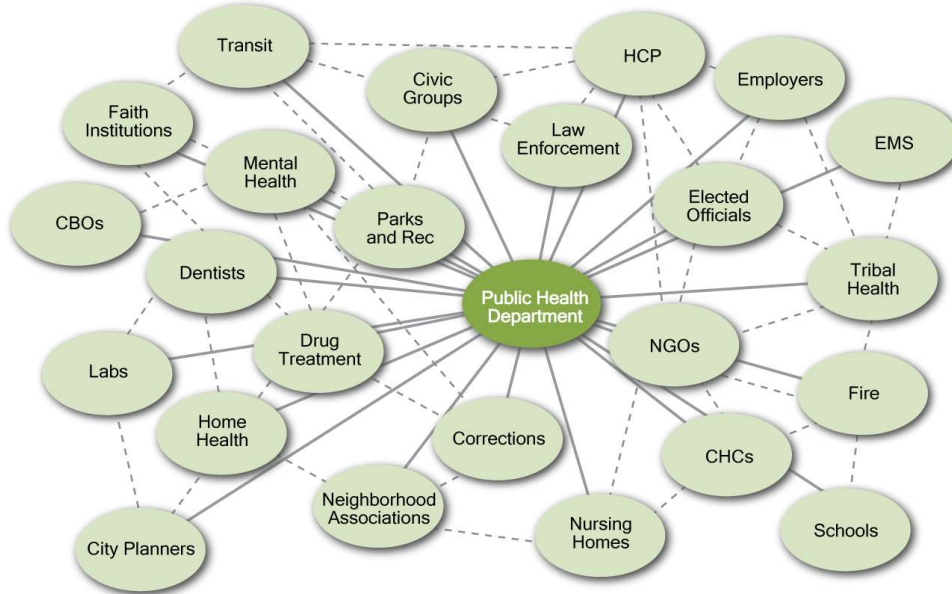
The Florida Department of Health in Polk County conducts a Community Health Assessment (CHA) process every 5 years. The most recent Polk County CHA was published in 2025 as the result of an 18-month-long data collection and prioritization process seeking to identify the major health and social issues affecting the health status and quality of life among Polk County residents. The CHA data was utilized to determine the most important health needs for residents of Polk County Florida and where actionable improvements could take place. The 2026-2030 Polk County CHIP outlines the strategies and objectives community partners have developed in response to the priorities established from the 2025 Polk County CHA process.

Methodology

Mobilizing Community Partners

In the fall of 2023, the Florida Department of Health in Polk County mobilized community partners to begin a new CHA process. Community partner mobilization began on September 8, 2023, with a CHA Kick-Off Meeting. At this meeting, community partners were informed about the upcoming CHA and introduced to the MAPP 2.0 process, as well as introduced the first of the three MAPP 2.0 assessments – the Community Partner Assessment (CPA). Through participation in the CPA, agencies could designate individuals to participate in the Polk County Community Health Assessment Workgroup. Polk County’s CHA Workgroup was comprised of a diverse group of representatives from public, private, non-profit, social services, and governmental entities that make up the public health system in Polk County. The Polk County CHA Workgroup provided community-based oversight for the CHA process and met on a monthly basis to review and analyze data that had been collected and guide next steps. The Polk County CHA Workgroup was instrumental in all aspects of data collection, from developing the survey tool, to collecting responses from community members and determining which agencies to engage in key informant focus groups. In order to conduct the CHA, the Workgroup utilized a nationally recognized model called Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnership 2.0 (MAPP 2.0). The MAPP 2.0 process is described in the following section.

Figure 1. Local Public Health System Jelly Bean Diagram



The MAPP 2.0 Process

Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships 2.0 (MAPP 2.0) is a community-driven strategic planning tool for improving community health. MAPP was developed by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC). This framework helps communities apply strategic thinking to prioritize public health issues and identify resources to address them.

The MAPP 2.0 framework is made up of three individual assessments – the Community Partner Assessment (CPA), the Community Status Assessment (CSA), and the Community Context Assessment (CCA) – that together make up the final Community Health Assessment (CHA) report. Findings from each assessment are analyzed to better understand the assets and needs of a community and assist public health system partners as they focus on aligning resources toward improving the health and well-being of the community.

Community Partner Assessment (CPA)

The Community Partner Assessment (CPA) replaces the Local Public Health System Assessment (LPHSA) from the original MAPP framework. The CPA allows community partners involved in MAPP 2.0 to assess their individual systems, processes, and capacities, and also assesses the collective capacity as a network of community partners to complete the MAPP 2.0 process. For the Polk County CPA, the Florida Department of Health in Polk County launched a CPA Survey in the fall of 2023. The main goal of this survey was to collect information on the community partners that make up the Polk County local public health system and assess each partners' capacity to support the MAPP 2.0 process. FDOH-Polk shared the survey among partners and asked that each agency complete the survey only once. The survey asked information about the populations each agency serves, which of the public health essential services they focus on, and the capacity in which each agency could assist the MAPP 2.0 process. The CPA Survey provided an opportunity for agencies to formally sign-up to participate in the Polk County CHA Workgroup. It also allowed agencies to share which assessments they would like to participate in, and how they could assist. This gave FDOH-Polk a repository of community assets to utilize during the MAPP 2.0 process, including staff time, meeting space, and other assistance.

Community Status Assessment – Community Survey and Secondary Data

The Community Status Assessment (CSA) collects quantitative data on the status of the community, including demographics and health status. For the CSA in Polk County, a community survey was deployed to learn more about residents' opinions on health and quality of life in Polk County. The survey tool, developed by FDOH-Polk and the Polk County CHA Workgroup, contained a total of 41 questions and was available in both an online electronic format and a printed paper format. The survey was available in English and was also translated to Spanish and Haitian Creole in order to reach populations that might not speak English. The survey was distributed electronically through community partner email distribution lists and databases. Several community partners played a role in encouraging their employees and/or the population they serve to complete the survey. We also worked with several community partners to distribute paper surveys where appropriate, including free clinics and other social support agencies. The survey collection period was approximately 11 weeks during the spring and early summer of 2024. A total of 2,052 responses were collected from Polk County residents.

The CSA also involves collecting and analyzing any available secondary data about health status and quality of life in Polk County. Indicators on health and quality of life were collected from a variety of data sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute County Health Rankings, Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS), the CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), and many others. For the State of Florida, many of these indicators are compiled into a central database by Florida's Bureaus of Community Health Assessment and Vital Statistics called the FL Health Community Health Assessment Resource Tool Set (CHARTS).

Community Context Assessment (CCA) – Key Informant Focus Groups

The Community Context Assessment (CCA) is a qualitative tool to collect and assess data. For Polk's CCA, key informant focus groups were conducted in order to gather data regarding hard-to-reach populations and certain priority health topics. The questions asked at focus groups were very similar to those asked in the survey. A total of 9 focus groups were conducted with representatives from various health and social service agencies to learn more about the following priority populations and health topics: youth, older adults, migrant workers, the homeless/unhoused population, chronic disease, behavioral health, and maternal/infant health.

Key Themes Identified through the 2025 CHA Prioritization Process

The FDOH-Polk Planning Team analyzed all data collected from the community survey, key informant focus groups, and secondary data indicators. Through this data analysis, the following 10 health topics were identified as priority areas (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

The results of this data analysis were presented at a Polk Community Health Workgroup Meeting on February 4, 2025 via Microsoft Teams. This meeting was attended by 95 individuals representing various agencies in Polk County’s local public health system. After viewing a presentation on the data analysis and key indicators, the attendees participated in a ranking exercise, where key health topics were ranked on a scale of 1-10 by *scope and severity*, and *ability to impact*. A total of 75 individuals representing approximately 47 agencies of Polk County’s local public health system participated in this exercise. The table below (Figure 2) shows the final ranking of priority health topics:

Figure 2. 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

Planning Summary

Amid unprecedented growth and development within Polk County, community partners embarked on a process to update their shared community vision for the county in January 2023. With the facilitative leadership of Polk Vision – a community-led partnership of organizations, businesses, government and individuals – a new vision was adopted in August 2024 that describes a *healthy community* as, “one where all residents have equitable access to essential services, feel safe and connected, and enjoy a high quality of life that encompasses both basic needs and opportunities for personal fulfillment” (p. 67, Polk Vision Community Vision Comprehensive Update). This definition was highlighted to all participants of the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) process to reinforce that the needs of the community are central to CHIP development. Upon completion of the 2025 Polk County Community Health Assessment (CHA) in June 2025, meetings with various community partners were then held to review the CHA findings, refine the priority areas that were selected during the Polk CHA prioritization exercise (held in February 2024), and create goals and objectives for the 2026-2030 CHIP. Several previously established community teams were engaged in these CHIP meetings, including the Polk Vision Behavioral Health Team, the Florida Healthy Babies (FHB) Team, the Coalition on Injury Prevention of Polk County (CIP), and the Polk Vision Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Team. Two additional workgroups were also convened to discuss and oversee the development of goals and objectives pertaining to the priority areas of *Access to Health Services* and *Chronic Disease*.

The **Polk Vision Behavioral Health Team** was established shortly after the completion of the 2020 CHA, which is when it became overwhelmingly apparent that improved and expanded behavioral health services and supports were needed in the county. Since its inception, the Team has funded two behavioral health studies – one a countywide behavioral health gaps analysis (completed in June 2021) and the other a Polk County Public Schools-specific behavioral health gaps analysis (completed in September 2024). Both studies have since been used by the Team to identify strategies for improving access to and utilization of behavioral health services within the county. Team strategies include efforts to break down silos among behavioral health stakeholders to increase alignment among agencies and contribute to more efficient, integrated behavioral health care; engage various community groups in immediate and ongoing activities to improve community health; promote youth behavioral health interventions, and; expand the capacity of behavioral health services in Polk. The Team discussed objectives that address both the *Access to Health Services* and *Behavioral Health* priority areas of the 2026-2030 CHIP, as well as align with current Team strategies. The Team meets monthly to discuss action steps, accomplishments, and barriers to implementing these objectives. Progress narratives and available data updates are provided during these meetings.

The **FHB Team** is currently working on interventions to reduce the Polk County infant mortality rate. Objectives on their workplan address social and economic barriers to health that contribute to high infant mortality rates, such as focusing on access to Healthy Start and WIC services, promoting safe sleep practices, ensuring families have a safe sleeping environment available, promoting breastfeeding, and providing resources to communities with high rates of infant mortality. The leadership of this team established objectives that fit into both the *Chronic Disease* and the *Injury Prevention & Safety* priority areas of the 2026-2030 CHIP. The FHB Team meets quarterly to discuss action steps, accomplishments, and barriers to implementing these objectives. Progress narratives and available data updates are provided during these meetings.

CIP is an existing community coalition formed in 2002 to provide injury prevention resources and education throughout the county. The group focuses on providing these resources in the areas of child drowning prevention, bicycle/pedestrian safety, and falls prevention for aging adults. The leadership of this community coalition discussed the results of the 2025 CHA and established objectives that fit into the *Injury Prevention & Safety* priority area. CIP meets monthly to discuss action steps, accomplishments, and barriers to implementing these objectives. Progress narratives and available data updates are provided during these meetings.

The **Polk Vision Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Team** has aligned their tactical plan with the Polk Transportation Planning Organization and their new Vision Zero Action Plan. The long-term goal of the Vision Zero Action Plan is to reduce pedestrian and bicyclist accidents to 0. Strategies of this plan include efforts to increase sidewalk access and increase community education regarding bicycle and pedestrian safety. The leadership of this community group met and decided that the action items also align with the bicycle and pedestrian safety objective in the *Injury Prevention & Safety* priority area. The Team meets quarterly to discuss action steps, accomplishments, and barriers to implementing these objectives. Progress narratives and available data updates are provided during these meetings.

The **Access to Health Services Polk CHIP Workgroup** first convened in August 2025 with representation from various community organizations dedicated to and/or involved in efforts to improve access to health services across the 1,798 square miles of land encompassing Polk County. During the initial meeting, the Workgroup completed a Root Cause Analysis and a Gaps Analysis focused on this priority area. Results of the Root Cause Analysis highlighted issues with funding cuts, laws restricting access to health services, low health literacy, transportation barriers, the geographic size of Polk County, population growth, a shortage of providers, cost of living, cost of health care, siloed services, and stigma as some of the main barriers to improving access to health services in Polk. Results of the Gaps Analysis focused on increasing patient navigators, peer education, utilization of community centers, health literacy, convenient service hours, mobile health units, consistent and reliable services, grant writing, and prevention services as examples of strategies to increase access to health services. The group crafted objectives and agreed to make a collaborative impact on the *Access to Health Services* priority area. The Workgroup will continue to meet on a bi-monthly basis to discuss action steps, accomplishments, and barriers to implementing these objectives. Progress narratives and available data updates will be provided during these meetings.

The **Chronic Disease Polk CHIP Workgroup** also began convening in August 2025 with representation from various community groups (e.g., Polk Vision Food Security Council, Tobacco Free Polk Partnership) and organizations (e.g., AdventHealth, BayCare Health Systems, Lakeland Regional Health) to address chronic disease within the County. During the initial meeting, the Workgroup completed a Root Cause Analysis and a Gaps Analysis focused on this priority area. Results of the Root Cause Analysis highlighted issues with funding cuts, low health literacy, inconsistent Electronic Health Records, separation of medical and dental care, short medical visits often focused on treatment, social isolation, transportation barriers, inconvenient clinic hours, nutritional value of distributed foods, non-walkable communities, weather impacts on recreational activities, and social media as some of the main barriers to improving chronic disease outcomes. Results of the Gaps Analysis focused on incentivizing physicians to prescribe healthy habits, promoting a single source for finding resources and information, leveraging trusted health entities to deliver health information, and providing consistent mobile services as examples of strategies to improve rates of chronic disease among residents. The group crafted objectives and agreed

to make a collaborative impact on the *Chronic Disease* priority area. The Workgroup will continue to meet on a bimonthly basis as a subcommittee of the *Access to Health Services* Workgroup to discuss action steps, accomplishments, and barriers to implementing these objectives. Progress narratives and available data updates will be provided during these meetings.

CHIP Outline

Priority 1: Access to Health Services

Goal 1.1: Increase access to health services.

- 1.1.1 By December 31, 2026, increase the number of Polk County residents provided health services through community-based health outreach efforts conducted throughout the county by 25% (from 6,004 [2024] to 7,505 residents).
- 1.1.2 By December 31, 2026, increase the number of referrals to the Polk HealthCare Plan by 5% (from 11,567 [2024] to 12,145 referrals).
- 1.1.3 By December 31, 2026, convene at least 6 meetings of health and human service agencies that serve vulnerable populations in Polk County (2025 baseline: 3 meetings).
- 1.1.4 By August 1, 2026, increase the number of Polk County students who are assessed for dental sealant eligibility through the School Based Sealant Program by 10% (from 2,915 [8/1/2024-7/31/2025] to 3,207 students).

Priority 2: Behavioral Health

Goal 2.1: Decrease behavioral health stigma.

- 2.1.1 By December 31, 2030, increase the percentage of Polk County adults who agree that their community is understanding of people with mental health problems from 26.6% (2024) to 30%.

Goal 2.2: Increase behavioral health supports for youth.

- 2.2.1 By August 1, 2026, screen at least 150 pre-kindergarten students in Polk County using the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire- Social Emotional (ASQ-SE)* screening tool (2025 baseline: 33 pre-kindergarten students).
- 2.2.2 By August 1, 2026, develop a youth-focused webpage for inclusion in the Polk County behavioral health resources website (2025 baseline: 0 youth-focused webpage).

Priority 3: Chronic Disease

Goal 3.1: Reduce rates of chronic disease.

- 3.1.1 By December 31, 2026, increase the number of Polk County residents who receive chronic disease prevention health education by 5% (from 3,798 [2024] to 3,988 residents).
- 3.1.2 By December 31, 2026, increase the number of referrals among Polk County residents to Tobacco Free Florida/Central Florida AHEC's tobacco cessation services by 20% (from 537 [2024] to 644 referrals).
- 3.1.3 By June 30, 2028, reduce the rate of high-risk pregnancies resulting in birth before 37 weeks gestation in Polk County from 18.14% (2023) to 16.5%.
- 3.1.4 By June 30, 2028, increase the rate of Polk County WIC clients that are partially or fully breastfed for at least 26 weeks from 45.94% (Q1 2025) to 48.05%.
- 3.1.5 By December 31, 2028, reduce the rate of emergency department visits from hypertension among Polk County residents from 661.9 per 100,000 (2024) to 638.5 per 100,000.

Priority 4: Injury Prevention & Safety

Goal 4.1: Reduce unintentional injury deaths among Polk County residents.

- 4.1.1 By June 30, 2028, reduce the number of sleep-related infant deaths from 6 (2024) to 3 sleep-related infant deaths.
- 4.1.2 By December 31, 2028, decrease the near-drowning instances among children ≤ 9 reported to 911 from 38 (2024) to 27.
- 4.1.3 By December 31, 2028, decrease the rate of unintentional falls deaths among Polk County adults ages 65 and older from 59.2 per 100,000 (2023) to 51.0 per 100,000.
- 4.1.4 By December 31, 2028, decrease the number of total vehicle crashes with a pedestrian or cyclist from 631 (2024) to 600.

Goal 4.2: Promote safety of Polk County residents.

- 4.2.1 By December 31, 2030, reduce the number of verified human trafficking cases from 22 (2024) to 19.

Priority 1: Access to Health Services

Why It Matters

Access to comprehensive, quality healthcare services is crucial for improving health and quality of life. In Polk County, *Access to Health Services* continues to be identified through the CHA process as a top priority health issue impacting residents. Between 2020 and 2025, *Access to Health Services* rose in rank from the number two priority health issue in 2020 to the number one in 2025.

The population of Polk County grew exponentially between 2020-2025, making Polk the fastest-growing county in Florida and one of the fastest-growing in the nation. Unfortunately, the rate of health care providers serving the county did not keep up with this growth and, in some instances, worsened. More specifically, Polk experienced a decrease in the numbers of licensed Physicians, Family Practice Physicians, Internists, OB/GYNs, Pediatricians, and Psychologists. On the other hand, Polk experienced an increase in the numbers of licensed Dentists, Dental Hygienists, Clinical Social Workers, Mental Health Counselors, and Marriage and Family Therapists. However, despite these increases, the number of providers from every specialty mentioned above remains insufficient to adequately serve Polk's growing population.

When comparing results from the 2019 and 2024 Polk CHA surveys, the percentages of adult survey respondents who reported experiencing instances where they were not able to receive needed medical, dental, or behavioral health care within the past year increased. Some of the main reasons that were given as to why they were not able to receive care were because they were unable to afford to pay for care, unable to schedule an appointment when needed, or unable to find a provider who took their insurance.

Additional Data Support

Rates of licensed Physicians, Family Practice Physicians, Internists, OB/GYNs, Pediatricians, Physician Assistants, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, Dentists, Dental Hygienists, Psychologists, Behavioral/Mental Health Professionals (FDOH, Division of Medical Quality Assurance)

Rates of Psychiatrists, and psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (University of South Florida, FL Center for Behavioral Health Workforce)

Rates of Polk CHA survey respondents who report not receiving needed medical, dental, and/or mental health care within the past year (Polk CHA Survey)

Percent of population uninsured (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey)

Barriers to Success

Difficulty referring undocumented persons to resources

Population growth of Polk County

Large size of Polk County – distance required to travel to access services

Funding cuts (e.g., Medicaid)

Laws restricting access to health services for certain populations

Low health literacy among residents

Transportation barriers

Shortage of providers

Cost of living – basic needs (e.g., food, shelter) prioritized over healthcare needs

Cost of health care

Siloed services

Stigma

Health insurance dictating services

Eligibility criteria to receive assistance/services

Existing Community Assets

2-1-1; AdventHealth; BayCare; Central Florida Health Care (CFHC); clinics with weekend hours; community health and wellness navigators; community-based organizations offering community health fairs; food banks and other food distribution efforts; free clinics (e.g., Lakeland Volunteers in Medicine, Good Samaritan Free Clinic); free HIV and STI testing; Hazel Health (Polk County Public Schools); Lakeland Regional Health; mobile health units; Polk HealthCare Plan; Polk Library Cooperative; public transit travel training; sliding fee schedules (CFHC); United Way of Central Florida (UWCF); We Care of Central Florida; www.FindHelp.org; www.PolkCountyBehavioralHealthResources.org

Community Alignment

AdventHealth Heart of Florida Community Health Plan (2025); AdventHealth Lake Wales Community Health Plan (2025); BayCare CHNA Implementation Plan (2023-2025); FDOH-Polk Strategic Plan (2023-2027); FDOH – State Health Improvement Plan (2022-2026); Healthy People 2030; Healthy Start Coalition Service Delivery Plan; Polk County Community Health Assessment (2025); Polk Vision Community Vision Comprehensive Update (2024)

Policy Change Needs

Medicaid expansion

Policies to incentivize qualified health professionals to relocate to Polk

Key Partners

AdventHealth; Alzheimer’s Association; BayCare; Central Florida Health Care (CFHC); Central Florida Speech & Hearing Center (CFSHC); Florida Department of Health in Polk County (FDOH-Polk); East Coast Migrant Head Start Project (ECMHSP); Empath Health; Florida Children’s Museum; Florida Southern College; Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands, and Polk Counties, Inc. (Healthy Start Coalition-HHP); Heart for Winter Haven; Ibis; Lakeland Regional Health (LRH); League of Women Voters of Polk County (LWV-Polk); Peace River Center; Polk County Board of County Commissioners – Community Health Care (Polk County BoCC – CHC); Polk County Parks and Natural Resources Division; Polk County Public Schools (PCPS); Polk for Recovery; Talbot House Ministries – Good Samaritan Free Clinic; Tri-County Human Services; United Way of Central Florida (UWCF)

Priority Area 1: Access to Health Services

Goal 1.1	Increase access to health services.
-----------------	--

Objective 1.1.1	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2026, increase the number of Polk County residents provided health services through community-based health outreach efforts* conducted throughout the county by 25% (from 6,004 [2024] to 7,505 residents).	AdventHealth; BayCare; FDOH-Polk; Florida Southern College; Ibis; LRH; Polk County BoCC – CHC	Baseline: 6,004 (2024)	# of people provided a health service	7,505	Manual (Polk Community Health Services Tracker)	Translation services

Strategies

Actions	Responsible Organizations
Develop mechanism for reporting outreach events across participating agencies.	AdventHealth; BayCare; FDOH-Polk; Florida Southern College; Ibis; LRH; Polk County BoCC - CHC
Strategically select locations/sites for and timing of outreach activities (e.g., coordinate with other well-attended community events).	
Implement communication strategies that inspire the community to act and show up to outreach events.	
Translate communications into Spanish and Haitian Creole.	

*Health services through community-based health outreach efforts include any medical, dental or behavioral health service that is provided to Polk County residents within the community (not in a medical office) by a Provider (e.g., Doctor or APRN), Non-Provider/Nurse (e.g., RN, LPN) or APRN student under the supervision of a Provider. Services may include (but are not limited to) physical exams, screenings, immunizations, assessments, and grief support.

Objective 1.1.2	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2026, increase the number of referrals to the Polk HealthCare Plan by 5% (from 11,567 [2024] to 12,145 referrals).	Polk County BoCC - CHC	Baseline: 11,567 (2024)	# of referrals	12,145	Polk County BoCC - CHC	Polk HealthCare Plan marketing materials
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Strategic placement and sharing of marketing materials (e.g., barbershops, grocery stores, laundromats, Polk Community Resource Centers)				BayCare; CFHC; Family Healthcare Foundation; Florida Children’s Museum; FDOH-Polk; Healthy Start Coalition-HHP; LRH; LWV-Polk; Polk County BoCC-CHC; Polk for Recovery; UWCF		
Designate and maintain space in DOH-Polk Lakeland Clinic to serve as a resource room for information on local social services and resources and staff with a Navigator to assist with referrals to the Polk HealthCare Plan.				FDOH-Polk; Family Healthcare Foundation		
Create and distribute a Polk HealthCare Plan “next steps” handout to accompany referrals.				FDOH-Polk; Polk County BoCC - CHC		
Track community-based referrals to Polk HealthCare Plan, as well as Polk HealthCare Plan enrollment (for comparison).				Polk County BoCC- CHC		
Increase awareness of Polk HealthCare Plan among faith-based organizations.				AdventHealth – chaplains; BayCare - Faith Community Nurses; LRH - Congregational Health		

Objective 1.1.3	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2026, convene at least 6 meetings of health and human service agencies that serve vulnerable populations in Polk County (2025 baseline: 3 meetings).	FDOH-Polk	Baseline: 3 (2025)	# of meetings	6 (2026)	Meeting agendas and minutes	Meeting space

Strategies	
Actions	Responsible Organizations
Increase information sharing and collaboration regarding access to health services.	BayCare; CFHC; CFSHC; ECMHSP; Family Healthcare Foundation; Florida Children’s Museum; FDOH-Polk; Healthy Start Coalition-HHP; LRH; LWV-Polk; Polk County BoCC - CHC; Polk for Recovery; Talbot House Ministries; UWCF
Develop community resources guides/directories for different needs/populations.	
Establish a subcommittee of Patient Navigators, Community Health Workers (CHWs), Peer Specialists, and any other personnel whose key function is to connect Polk residents to needed health services and resources.	

Objective 1.1.4	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By August 1, 2026, increase the number of Polk County students who are assessed for dental sealant eligibility through the School Based Sealant Program by 10% (from 2,915 [8/1/2024-7/31/2025] to 3,207 students).	FDOH-Polk - Dental; CFHC	Baseline: 2,915 (8/1/2024-7/31/2025)	# of students	3,207	FLOSS	Additional partnerships with youth-serving organizations to conduct dental assessments

Strategies	
Actions	Responsible Organizations
Expand School-based Sealant Program (SBSP) into middle schools and Teen Parent Program.	FDOH-Polk – Dental; PCPS
Increase partnerships with youth-serving organizations (e.g., Girls, Inc., YMCA, summer camps).	FDOH-Polk – Dental
Submit quarterly data regarding the number of students seen through the SBSP.	CFHC; FDOH-Polk – Dental

Priority 2: Behavioral Health

Why It Matters

Behavioral Health also continues to be a top priority health issue identified through the Polk CHA process. Between the 2019 and 2024 Polk CHA surveys, the percentage of adult respondents who rated their overall mental health status as either “excellent,” “very good,” or “good” declined. Subsequently, the percentage of respondents who rated their overall mental health as “fair” or “poor” increased. Relatedly, the percentage of adult survey respondents who reported overall satisfaction with their friendships and relationships also declined. When asked if their community is understanding of people with mental health problems, most survey respondents indicated that they either “disagree” or are “not sure,” potentially deterring residents from seeking the mental health care that they need.

Overall rates of emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations from mental disorders decreased across Polk County and the State of Florida since the 2020 CHA process; However, rates in Polk remain higher than the statewide averages. Additionally, rates of hospitalizations from mental disorders among youth (ages 0-17 years) and non-fatal self-harm injuries among youth (ages 12-18 years) increased between 2020 and 2025 while hospitalizations from or with eating disorders among youth (ages 12-18 years) more than doubled. The mental health status among Polk youth may be further illustrated by the increases in out-of-school suspensions, student absenteeism, youth Baker Acts, and School Environmental Safety Incidents that have also occurred since the 2020 CHA process.

With regards to substance use, Polk consistently experiences a higher rate of drug overdose deaths than the State, but a lower rate of opioid overdose deaths. Since 2019, opioid overdose deaths in Polk notably increased, alongside Emergency Medical Service (EMS) responses to suspected non-fatal drug overdoses, ED visits and hospitalizations from non-fatal drug overdoses, as well as drug overdose deaths.

Additional Data Support

Rate of self-reported mental health status (Polk CHA Survey)

Rate of self-reported satisfaction with friendships and relationships (Polk CHA Survey)

Rate of adults who had poor mental health on 14 or more of the past 30 days (BRFSS)

Rate of students who, in the past year, felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row and stopped doing usual activities (FYTS)

Rate of K-12 out-of-school suspensions (FDOE)

Rate of School Environmental Safety Incidents (FDOE)

Rate of students absent 21+ days from school (FDOE)

Rate of emergency department visits from mental disorders (FL AHCA)

Rate of emergency department visits from mental disorders, *except* drug and alcohol-induced mental disorders (FL AHCA)

Rate of ED visits from mental disorders among youth, ages 0-17 years (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from mental disorders (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from mental disorders, *except* drug and alcohol-induced mental disorders (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from mental disorders among youth, ages 0-17 years (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from non-fatal self-harm injuries among youth, ages 12-18 years (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from or with eating disorders as any listed diagnosis among youth, ages 12-18 years (FL AHCA)

Rate of Baker Acts (DCF – Baker Act Dashboard)

Rate of Baker Acts among youth, ages 0-17 years (DCF – Baker Act Dashboard)

Rate of EMS responses to suspected non-fatal drug overdoses (FL EMSTARS)

Rate of EMS responses to suspected non-fatal opioid-involved overdoses (FL EMSTARS)

Rate of emergency department visits from non-fatal drug overdoses (FL AHCA)

Rate of emergency department visits from non-fatal opioid-involved overdoses (FL AHCA)

Rate of suicide deaths (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)

Rate of drug overdose deaths (FDLE)

Rate of opioid overdose deaths (FDLE)

Barriers to Success

Stigma

Varying cultural beliefs surrounding behavioral health

Provider shortages

Population growth of Polk County

Large size of Polk County – distance required to travel to access services

Transportation issues

Funding and funding restrictions

Separation between physical and behavioral health

Social isolation

Social media – impact on mental health

Existing Community Assets

10th Judicial Circuit Court – Behavioral, Drug, and Veterans Courts; 9-8-8; BayCare-Center for Behavioral Health; Central Florida Behavioral Health Network; Central Florida Health Care (CFHC); Children’s Home Society of Florida; Early Learning Coalition of Polk County (ELC-Polk); Florida Behavioral Medicine; Florida Department of Children and Families (FL DCF); Gospel, Inc.; Hazel Health (Polk County Public Schools); Heart for Winter Haven – Center for Well-Being; Heartland for Children, Inc.; Ibis; InnerACT Alliance; Kids Need Both, Inc.; Lakeland Regional Health – Harrell Family Center for Behavioral Wellness; Lake Wales Care Center; Live Tampa Bay; Peace River Center; Polk for Recovery; Peer Recovery Specialists; Polk County Board of County Commissioners – Community Health Care (Polk County BoCC-CHC); Polk County Public Schools (PCPS); Polk County Sheriff’s Office; Polk Vision; Polk Vision Behavioral Health Team; Polk Vision PCPS Behavioral/Mental Health Collaborative Council; support groups (e.g., Alcoholics / Narcotics Anonymous, grief support, recovery); Talbot House Ministries; The Graceful Hope Foundation; The Mission in Winter Haven; Total Life Health Center; Tri-County Human Services; United Way of Central Florida; YesCare; www.PolkCountyBehavioralHealthResources.org; www.WhenYouKnow.org

Community Alignment

AdventHealth Heart of Florida Community Health Plan (2025); BayCare CHNA Implementation Plan (2023-2025); FDOH – State Health Improvement Plan (2022-2026); Polk Vision Behavioral Health Team Tactical Plan; Polk Vision PCPS Behavioral/Mental Health Collaborative Council Workplan; Polk County Community Health Assessment (2025); Polk Vision Community Vision Comprehensive Update (2024)

Policy Change Needs

Policies to support behavioral health provider recruitment

Policies to strengthen and support mental health parity laws

Incorporation of behavioral health screenings within medical visits

Key Partners

BayCare; Central Florida Behavioral Health Network; Early Learning Coalition of Polk County (ELC-Polk); Florida Department of Health in Polk County – Public Health Planning (FDOH-Polk – PHP); InnerACT Alliance – UthMPACT; Polk County Board of County Commissioners – Community Health Care (Polk County BoCC – CHC); Polk County Public Schools (PCPS); Polk Vision; Polk Vision Behavioral Health Team; Polk Vision PCPS Behavioral/Mental Health Collaborative Council; Tri-County Human Services

Priority Area 2: Behavioral Health

Goal 2.1

Decrease behavioral health stigma.

Objective 2.1.1	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2030, increase the percentage of Polk County adults who agree that their community is understanding of people with mental health problems from 26.6% (2024) to 30%.	FDOH-Polk – PHP	Baseline: 26.6% (2024)	% survey respondents who “agree” that their community is understanding of people with mental health problems	30%	Polk CHA Survey	Campaign marketing materials
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Promote the <i>When You Know</i> anti-stigma campaign among community partners and residents to increase the number of testimonials shared on the campaign website.				Polk County BoCC-CHC; Polk Vision Behavioral Health Team		
Implement the annual <i>Conversations in Behavioral Health</i> summit.				Polk County BoCC – CHC; Polk Vision; Polk Vision Behavioral Health Team		
Implement Parent Panels within Polk County Public Schools to foster student success and resilience.				PCPS		

Goal 2.2	Increase behavioral health supports for youth.
-----------------	---

Objective 2.2.1	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By August 1, 2026, screen at least 150 pre-kindergarten students in Polk County using the <i>Ages and Stages Questionnaire- Social Emotional</i> (ASQ-SE) screening tool (2025 baseline: 33 pre-kindergarten students).	ELC-Polk; PCPS	Baseline: 33 (2025)	# of students screened	150	Manual	Funding for ASQ-SE screening tool
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Outreach to Pre-K program providers for potential partnership in screening initiative.				ELC-Polk; PCPS; Polk Vision		
Coordinate with partnering pre-K programs to conduct screening during Summer 2026 (e.g., Camp Early Bird and other pre-K summer programs).				ELC-Polk; PCPS		

Objective 2.2.2	Responsible Organization	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By August 1, 2026, develop a youth-focused webpage for inclusion in the Polk County behavioral health resources website (2025 baseline: 0 youth-focused webpage).	Polk County BoCC	Baseline: 0 youth-focused webpage (2025)	# of youth-focused webpages	1 youth-focused webpage	www.pcbhr.org	Webpage content
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Facilitate focus groups to gather input for webpage development.				Polk County BoCC – CHC		
Provide subject matter expertise for webpage content and design (upon request).				BayCare; InnerACT Alliance – UthMPACT; PCPS; Tri-County Human Services		
Oversee webpage development.				Polk County BoCC – CHC		

Priority 3: Chronic Disease

Why It Matters

Chronic diseases are the leading causes of death and disability across the United States. In Polk County, four of the top five leading causes of death are chronic diseases, including: (#1) Cancer, (#2) Heart Disease, (#3) Stroke, and (#5) Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease or CLRD. Additionally, Polk County residents experience higher rates of emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and deaths from these and other chronic conditions – including Asthma, Dementia, Diabetes, and Hypertension – than the State of Florida.

Many chronic diseases are caused by certain risk behaviors, including tobacco use, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and excessive alcohol use:

Tobacco

In 2022, current smoking rates among Polk County adults was 16.3% compared to 11.3% among all Florida adults and 11.6% of adults nationwide (National Health Interview Survey).

Among Polk County middle and high school students, about 10% report currently vaping nicotine. While much is still unknown about the long-term health effects of vaping, the significant health risks posed by nicotine are widely known, including addiction, cardiovascular issues, and negative effects on brain development, particularly among youth.

Poor Nutrition & Physical Inactivity

In Polk County, 40.9% of adults (ages 18+ years) are obese compared to 31.6% of all Florida adults (2022). Among middle and high school students, 18% of students in Polk are obese compared to 14.5% of students across the State of Florida (2024).

From the 2025 Polk CHA survey, 30.1% of adult respondents report eating the recommended five cups of fruits and vegetables every day while only 20.6% report meeting the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week.

Excessive alcohol use

Although lower than the statewide average, the rate of Polk County adults who engage in heavy or binge drinking has increased since 2016, rising to 15.6% among Polk adults compared to 16.7% of Florida adults (2022, CDC PLACES).

Current alcohol use among Polk County middle and high school students has decreased over time, however, remains higher than the statewide average (11.8%) at 13.7% (2022, FYTS).

Additional Data Support

Leading causes of death (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)

Rate of current smoking among adults (BRFSS)

Rate of binge drinking among adults (BRFSS)

Rate of obesity among adults (BRFSS)

Rate of current nicotine vaping among middle and high school students (FYSAS)

Rate of current alcohol use among middle and high school students (FYSAS)

Rate of obesity among middle and high school students (FYTS)

Rate of overall food insecurity (Feeding America)

Rate of child food insecurity (Feeding America)

Percentage of mothers who initiate breastfeeding (FDOH, WIC)

Percentage of WIC infants and children <24 months who were ever breastfed in Polk County (FDOH, WIC)

Rate of emergency department (ED) visits from Asthma (FL AHCA)

Rate of ED visits from Organic Dementia (FL AHCA)

Rate of ED visits from Alzheimer's Disease (FL AHCA)

Rate of ED visits from Hypertension (FL AHCA)

Rate of ED visits from Diabetes (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from Asthma (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from Organic Dementia (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from Alzheimer's Disease (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from Hypertension (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from Coronary Heart Disease (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from Diabetes (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease – including Asthma (FL AHCA)

Rate of hospitalizations from Stroke (FL AHCA)

Rate of Cancer incidence (University of Miami Medical School, Florida Cancer Data System)

Rate of deaths from Organic Dementia (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)
Rate of deaths from Alzheimer’s Disease (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)
Rate of deaths from Hypertension (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)
Rate of deaths from Heart Disease (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)
Rate of deaths from Diabetes (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)
Rate of deaths from Cancer (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)
Rate of deaths from Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)
Rate of deaths from Stroke (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)

Barriers to Success

Difficulty referring undocumented persons to resources
Population growth of Polk County
Large size of Polk County – distance traveled to access services
Provider shortages (including specialists)
Lack of referral resources
Health care services predominantly focused on treatment
Inability to keep an updated resource guide of all resources and supports available in the county
Funding cuts
Low health literacy among residents
Inconsistent electronic health records across health organizations
Separation between medical and dental
Short medical visits
Social isolation
Transportation barriers
Inconvenient clinic hours
Nutritional value of foods distributed via food banks, pantries, etc.
Non-walkable communities
Impact of weather on outdoor recreational activities

Social media – spread of misinformation

Fragmented continuum of care

Health insurance dictating services, medical equipment and medications

Existing Community Assets

AdventHealth *Food is Health* program; Area Agency on Aging; BayCare; Alzheimer’s Association’s community resource finder; CFHC Centering pregnancy program; Diabetes support groups and prevention/self-management programs; Feeding Tampa Bay; food banks and distribution efforts; free DME; free health screenings and classes; free nicotine replacement therapy (FDOH-Polk and CFAHEC); free nutrition classes; Florida Southern College; Lakeland Regional Health; mobile health units; Polk County parks and walking trails; Polk County Fire Rescue paramedicine program; Polk County HealthCare Plan; Polk County Public Schools; senior centers; Senior Connection Center; strong network of senior service providers; UF/IFAS Extension Polk County; United Way of Central Florida; Vision Zero; Volunteers in Service to the Elderly (VISTE); We Care of Central Florida

Community Alignment

AdventHealth Lake Wales Community Health Plan (2025); Circuit 10 Child Abuse Death Review Action Plan; FDOH-Polk Strategic Plan (2023-2027); FDOH – State Health Improvement Plan (2022-2026); Florida Healthy Babies Plan (2025-2030); Healthy People 2030; Healthy Start Coalition Service Delivery Plan; Polk County Community Health Assessment (2025); Polk Vision Community Vision Comprehensive Update (2024)

Policy Change Needs

Policies that make healthy choices the easy choice within local and community food environments

Tax and legal rules that assign costs of unhealthy foods to the organizations that produce and profit from them

Policies to limit predatory marketing of unhealthy foods

Policies to allow for local tobacco control

Policies requiring coverage of effective medications that are most affordable

Policies to incorporate proactive/preventive medicine and practices into routine medical visits

Key Partners

AdventHealth; Alzheimer’s Association; BayCare; Central Florida Area Health Education Center (CFAHEC); Central Florida Health Care (CFHC); Circuit 10 Fetal/Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) Team; City of Haines City; City of Winter Haven; CivCom; Florida Department of Health in Polk County (FDOH-Polk); Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands and Polk County, Inc. (Healthy Start Coalition – HHP); Lakeland Regional Health (LRH); League of Women Voters of Polk County (LWV-Polk); Polk County Board of County Commissioners – Community Health Care (Polk County BoCC – CHC); Redlands Christian Migrant Association; Senior Connection Center; Senior Helpers; Talbot House Ministries; Tobacco Free Polk (TFP) Partnership; University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Polk County (UF/IFAS); United Way of Central Florida (UWCF)

Priority Area 3: Chronic Disease

Goal 3.1

Reduce rates of chronic disease.

Objective 3.1.1	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2026, increase the number of Polk County residents who receive chronic disease prevention health education* by 5% (from 3,798 [2024] to 3,988 residents).	BayCare; CFAHEC; LRH; Senior Connection Center; UF/IFAS	Baseline: 3,798 (2024)	# of residents	3,798	Manual (Polk CDP Health Education Tracker)	Chronic disease prevention health education promotional materials
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Maintain a registry of available free resources for community members.				Polk County BoCC – CHC		
Align efforts by having guest speakers go to each agency’s health education classes.				BayCare; CFAHEC; FDOH-Polk; LRH; Senior Connection Center; UF/IFAS		
Increase advertising of available chronic disease prevention health education classes offered in Polk.						

*Chronic disease prevention health education includes education that occurs with intentional participation in a formal setting, such as classes, seminars, workshops, referral appointments with a specialist, etc. Education provided at a health fair via tabling/informal conversation or during a visit with a primary care provider is not included in this measure.

Objective 3.1.2	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2026, increase the number of referrals among Polk County residents to Tobacco Free Florida/Central Florida AHEC's tobacco cessation services by 20% (from 537 [2024] to 644 referrals).	CFAHEC	Baseline: 537 (2024)	# of referrals	644	CFAHEC	Tobacco Free Florida/CFAHEC tobacco cessation promotional materials
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Ensure that tobacco use is assessed during client/patient encounters and an organizational tobacco cessation referral process is in place.				AdventHealth; Alzheimer's Association; BayCare; FDOH-Polk; LRH; Polk County BoCC – CHC; Talbot House Ministries		
Promote Tobacco Free Florida/CFAHEC tobacco cessation services.						
Track and provide data on the number of tobacco cessation referrals (quarterly), class enrollees (quarterly), class completers (quarterly), and duplicate referrals (annually) from Polk.				CFAHEC		

Objective 3.1.3	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By June 30, 2028, reduce the rate of high-risk pregnancies* resulting in birth before 37 weeks gestation in Polk County from 18.14% (2023) to 16.5%.	FDOH-Polk	Baseline: 18.14% (2023)	% of high-risk pregnancies resulting in birth before 37 weeks gestation	16.5%	FDOH Bureau of Vital Statistics (Birth Counts Query System , FLHealthCHARTS)	Tracking documentation
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Distribute blood pressure monitors and tracking mechanisms through Moms with Monitors program.				FDOH-Polk – OB Team		
Educate community on signs/symptoms of high blood pressure in pregnant and postpartum women.				Circuit 10 FIMR Team; DOH-Polk – OB Team; Florida Healthy Babies Team; LWV-Polk		
Provide resources linking pregnant and postpartum women with high blood pressure to care.						

*High-risk pregnancy = mother had history of gestational or pre-pregnancy diabetes, chronic or gestational hypertension, previous preterm delivery or other previous poor birth outcome.

Objective 3.1.4	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By June 30, 2028, increase the rate of WIC clients that are partially or fully breastfed for at least 26 weeks from 45.94% (Q1 2025) to 48.05%.	FDOH-Polk WIC	Baseline: 45.94% (Q1 2025)	% of WIC clients that are partially or fully breastfed	48.05%	WIC Quarterly Reports	Breastfeeding support group promotional materials; Additional breastfeeding support group venues
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Disseminate Breastfeeding Resource Guide.				FDOH-Polk – WIC		
Provide updated breastfeeding Peer Counselor information to the medical community.						
Launch breastfeeding education and announcements to social media.				FDOH-Polk – WIC; Florida Healthy Babies Team		
Facilitate breastfeeding support groups in the community.				FDOH-Polk – WIC; UWCF		

Objective 3.1.5	Responsible Organization(s)	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2028, reduce the rate of emergency department visits from hypertension among Polk County residents from 616.4 per 100,000 (2024) to 583.8 per 100,000.	FDOH-Polk; Talbot House Ministries	Baseline: 616.4 per 100,000 (2024)	Per 100,000 population	583.8 per 100,000	Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (FL AHCA)	Blood pressure monitors w/ batteries; blood pressure magnets
Strategies						
Actions				Responsible Organizations		
Distribute blood pressure monitors to those in need.				FDOH-Polk; Talbot House Ministries		
Partner with additional agencies to expand blood pressure monitor distribution efforts.				FDOH-Polk		
Acquire approval and distribute blood pressure magnets.				FDOH-Polk		
Institute PROMPT (Pregnancy-Related Optimal Management of Hypertension) visits at the nearest DOH clinic for postpartum, hypertensive women who present for delivery.				BayCare; FDOH-Polk; LRH		

Priority 4: Injury Prevention and Safety

Why It Matters

Unintentional Injuries are the 4th leading cause of death for Polk County residents and the leading cause of death for Polk County children. Polk County CHA Survey respondents ranked “low crime/safe neighborhoods” as the second most important factor in defining a healthy community. Survey respondents also ranked distracted driving as the 5th leading health problem in Polk County. 24% of survey respondents stated that they did not feel safe walking or riding their bike in their community; the most common reasons for not feeling safe walking/riding in their communities are unsafe drivers and the poor condition of/lack of sidewalks.

Additional Data Support

Rate of unintentional injury death (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)

Rate of hospitalization from non-fatal unintentional injuries (FL AHCA)

Rate of drowning death (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)

Rate of deaths from falls (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)

Rate of pedalcyclist deaths from motor vehicle traffic crashes (FDOH, Bureau of Vital Statistics)

Barriers to Success

Lack of sidewalks

Lack of street lighting

Cost of injury prevention mechanisms

Cost of swim lessons

Swim lesson vouchers age requirements

Existing Community Assets

Bike/Ped Resource Center; Bone Builders classes; certified helmet fitters; certified Safe Baby trainers; CIP; community baby showers; community education platforms; DCF; established annual community events to provide education; FDOH – Healthy Start; Healthy Families; Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands, and Polk Counties, Inc.; Lakeland Regional Health’s Falls Prevention Initiative; Polk County Fire Rescue; RSVP Polk; Safe Kids Suncoast Council; Senior Connection Center; Senior Helpers; State Child Abuse Death Review Team; swim

instructors and swim lesson programs; Swim lesson vouchers; Volunteers in Service to the Elderly (VISTE)

Community Alignment

Circuit 10 Child Abuse Death Review Action Plan; Coalition on Injury Prevention of Polk County (CIP) 2026 Strategic Objectives; FDOH-Polk Strategic Plan (2023-2027); FDOH – State Health Improvement Plan (2022-2026); Florida Healthy Babies Plan (2025-2030); Healthy People 2030; Healthy Start Coalition Service Delivery Plan; Lakeland Regional Health CHNA (2025); Polk County Community Health Assessment (2025); and Safe Kids Suncoast 2026 Strategic Objectives.

Policy Change Needs

Context-Based Designs to accommodate all road users

Vision Zero adoption by all municipalities

Wider age inclusion in injury prevention initiatives

Age-Friendly Policies

Key Partners

AdventHealth; Alzheimer’s Association; Bartow Police Department; BayCare; BayCare Kids Wellness and Safety Center; CARD-USF; Central Florida Regional Planning Council; Central Florida Speech & Hearing Center (CFSHC); Children’s Advocacy Center; Children’s Home Society; Circuit 10 Child Abuse Death Review (CADR) Team; Circuit 10 Fetal and Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) Team; Circuit 10 Human Trafficking Task Force; City of Lakeland Parks and Recreation; Coalition on Injury Prevention of Polk County (CIP); Florida Children’s Museum; Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF); Florida Department of Health in Polk County (FDOH-Polk); Florida Highway Patrol; Healthy Families Polk; Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands, and Polk Counties, Inc. (Healthy Start Coalition – HHP); Heartland for Children; Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital; Kittelson & Associates, Inc.; Lakeland Police Department (LPD); Lakeland Regional Health (LRH); One More Child; Polk City; Polk County Board of County Commissioners (Polk County – BoCC); Polk County Fire Rescue (PCFR); Polk County Safe Sleep Task Force; Polk County Transportation Planning Organization (Polk TPO); Polk Vision; PunchWorX, Inc.; RSVP Polk; Safe Kids Suncoast; Senior Connection Center; Senior Helpers; Swim Dynamic, LLC; United Way of Central Florida (UWCF); Winter Haven Women’s Hospital.

Priority Area 4: Injury Prevention and Safety

Goal 4.1

Reduce unintentional injury deaths among Polk County residents.

Objective 4.1.1	Responsible Organization	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By June 30, 2028, reduce the number of sleep-related infant deaths from 6 (2024) to 3 sleep-related infant deaths.	Florida Healthy Babies Team	Baseline: 6 (2024)	# of sleep-related deaths	3	DOH Bureau of Vital Statistics	Additional pack n plays

Strategies

Actions	Responsible Organizations
Distribute pack n plays through Beds4Babies program.	FDOH-Polk – Healthy Start
Collaborate with local injury prevention coalitions to educate on and promote safe sleep practices.	Circuit 10 CADR Team; Circuit 10 FIMR Team; FDOH-Polk; Polk Safe Sleep Task Force; Safe Kids
Provide safe sleep magnets, window clings, and posters to promote safe sleeping practices.	AdventHealth; BayCare; FDOH-Polk – WIC; Healthy Start Coalition-HHP; LRH; Safe Kids
Provide Safe Baby Trainings to community members.	FDOH-Polk; Healthy Start Coalition – HHP
Distribute Sleep Baby Safely campaign discharge bags to birthing hospitals and birthing centers.	AdventHealth; BayCare; Circuit 10 CADR Team; FDOH-Polk; Healthy Start Coalition – HHP; LRH

Objective 4.1.2	Responsible Organization	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2028, decrease the near-drowning instances among children ≤9 reported to 911 from 38 (2024) to 27.	Coalition on Injury Prevention of Polk County	Baseline: 38 (2024)	# of Drowning-related Calls to 911	27	PCFR Database	Swim vouchers for children over the age of 4; door alarms; pool alarms

Strategies

Actions	Responsible Organizations
Promote and monitor participation in swim lessons.	Children’s Advocacy Center; Children’s Home Society; CIP; Circuit 10 CADR Team; City of Lakeland Parks & Rec; DCF;
Collaborate with local injury prevention coalitions to educate on and promote water safety using the Keep Kids Safe from Drowning campaign.	
Distribute door alarms.	

	FDOH-Polk; LPD; LRH; PCFR; Safe Kids; Swim Dynamic, LLC; UWCF
Distribute pool alarms.	Circuit 10 CADR Team; FDOH – Polk; PCFR
Promote, facilitate, and monitor participation in the State of Florida swim voucher program.	FDOH-Polk
Provide dry-land water safety trainings to community members.	Circuit 10 CADR Team; CIP; FDOH-Polk; PCFR; Safe Kids

Objective 4.1.3	Responsible Organization	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2028, decrease the rate of unintentional falls deaths among Polk County adults ages 65 and older from 59.2 per 100,000 (2023) to 51.0 per 100,000.	Coalition on Injury Prevention of Polk County	Baseline: 59.2 per 100,000 (2023)	Rate of Unintentional Falls Deaths Among Adults 65+ per 100,000 of Population	51.0 per 100,000	DOH Bureau of Vital Statistics	Volunteers to teach falls prevention exercise classes

Strategies	
Actions	Responsible Organizations
Collaborate with local injury prevention coalitions to educate on and promote falls prevention methods.	Alzheimer’s Association; CATT-Rath Center; FCSHC; CIP; DOH-Polk; LRH; Polk County BoCC; PunchWorX, Inc.; RSVP Polk; Senior Connection Center; Senior Helpers
Provide falls prevention educational materials in all 3 major languages in Polk County.	
Host annual Falls Prevention Luncheon.	

Objective 4.1.4	Responsible Organization	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2028, decrease the number of total vehicle crashes with a pedestrian or cyclist from 631 (2024) to 600.	Coalition on Injury Prevention of Polk County	Baseline: 631 (2024)	# of Total Vehicle Crashes with a Pedestrian or Cyclist	600	Signal4 Analytics	Increased certified helmet fitters; helmets

Strategies	
Actions	Responsible Organizations
Collaborate with local injury prevention coalitions to educate on and promote bicycle and pedestrian safety.	BayCare Kids Wellness and Safety Center; CIP; FDOH-Polk; Heartland for Children; LPD; LRH; Safe Kids
Distribute and fit helmets to community members.	
Distribute reflective wrist bands to community members.	
Facilitate helmet fitter certification trainings.	Safe Kids

Adopt and implement Polk County’s Vision Zero Action Plan.	FDOH-Polk; Polk TPO; Polk Vision; Polk Vision’s Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Team
Implement recommended road and sidewalk improvements recommended in the Vision Zero action plan to reduce fatalities and serious injuries within the High Injury Network.	

Goal 4.2	Promote safety of Polk County residents.
-----------------	---

Objective 4.2.1	Responsible Organization	Current Performance Level	Unit of Measurement	Target	Data Source	Resources Needed
By December 31, 2030, reduce the number of verified human trafficking cases from 22 (2024) to 19.	Circuit 10 Human Trafficking Task Force	Baseline: 22 (2024)	# of Verified Cases	19	DCF Verified Cases for Labor Trafficking and CSEC Trafficking	FL Human Trafficking Hotline promotional materials

Strategies	
Action	Responsible Organizations
Participated in Circuit 10 Human Trafficking Task Force Meetings.	Circuit 10 Human Trafficking Task Force; DCF; FDOH-Polk; Heartland for Children
Collaborate with local agencies to educate recognizing the signs of human trafficking.	
Collaborate with local agencies to educate community members on how to report suspected human trafficking.	

Community Partners

- Jaylyn Abersold – BayCare Kids Wellness and Safety Center
- Tonya Akwetey, MPH – Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands, and Polk Counties, Inc.
- Marcia Andresen, MS – Polk County BOCC
- Jose Badillo – East Coast Migrant Head Start Project
- Chuck Barmby, AICP, CTP – City of Lakeland
- Marisa M. Barmby, AICP – Central Florida Regional Planning Council
- Rosa Barro Salas – Florida Department of Health in Polk County/Healthy Start
- Amy Beascochea, CD (GROW) – Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands, and Polk Counties, Inc.
- Caroline Benitez, MPH, CPH – Polk County BOCC
- Izora Bullock, PhD, CO HES – Senior Connection Center
- Yazmin Castellano-McDonough – Center for Autism & Related Disabilities USF
- Ivette Colon – Polk County BoCC
- Cindy DeBord, CH-CBC, CH-RCMS – Central Florida Health Care
- Fatema Elqreish – Florida Department of Health in Polk County
- Taylor Freeman, MPH, CPH – Florida Department of Health in Polk County
- Tabatha Gabbard, CNA, CPSTI – Lakeland Regional Health
- Tyiesha Ghent – Heartland For Children
- Georgiana Goodson – Senior Helpers
- Suzanne Gray, BSN, RN – Winter Haven Women’s Hospital
- Alison Grooms, MPH - AdventHealth
- Captain Luke Hauser – Bartow Police Department
- Patricia Henderson, MA – Senior Connection Center
- Sandra Hernandez – Healthy Families Polk
- Marty Hubbard – PunchWorX, Inc.
- Claudine Humber – Florida Children’s Museum
- Patricia Jackson – Polk City
- Joy Johnson, MSM, CPM – Polk County BOCC
- Angela Kaufman – Polk Transportation Planning Organization
- Nathan Kautz, PE, RSP1 – Kittelson & Associates, Inc.
- Aaron Kissler, MPH – Florida Department of Health in Polk County
- Curtis Knowles, FPED – Central Florida Regional Planning Council
- Ryan Kordek – Polk Transportation Planning Organization
- Keri Kozicki, MPH – BayCare Health System
- Tonya LaLonde, Au. D. – Central Florida Speech & Hearing Center
- Jenna Levine, MPH, CPH – Florida Department of Health in Polk County
- Oscar Lewis – Empath Health

- Roxie Linares, BSN, RN – Lakeland Regional Health
- Meghan Mapes, MPH, CPH – BayCare Health System
- Renisa Martinez, MSW, CPSTI – Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital/Safe Kids Suncoast
- Jody Mathewson – Alzheimer’s Association
- Sarah McAuley, BS RRT – Lakeland Regional Health
- Sara McNamee, MSN, RN – BayCare Health System
- Caitlin Mildrum – BayCare Kids Wellness and Safety Center
- Paula Mims – League of Women Voters of Polk County
- Cindy Mitchell – Polk Transportation Planning Organization
- Tracy Mullins, AICP – Polk County BOCC
- Jessica Napoleon, MPH, MCHES – Florida Department of Health in Polk County
- Andrea Nikolai, MPH, RDN, LDN – UF/IFAS Extension Polk County
- Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Palazzi-Xirinachs, DNP, APRN, MSN, ANP, BSN, RN-BC – Talbot House Ministries – Good Samaritan Free Clinic
- Craig Pickos – Polk for Recovery
- Captain Kristina Quenneville – Florida Highway Patrol
- Sheila Rainey, IMH-E, CPST – Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital/Safe Kids Suncoast
- Nellian Rios, MSN, RN, CDCES – Lakeland Regional Health
- Rina Rivas – One More Child
- Ariana Rivero - Tobacco Free Polk
- Olivia Roark – City of Lakeland Parks & Recreation
- Yadiris Romero, MA, CLC, CPST – Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands, and Polk Counties, Inc.
- Kathy Sellen – Polk County Fire Rescue
- Cindy Sharp – Lakeland Police Department
- Jo Shim – League of Women Voters of Polk County
- Michelle Shiver, CVA – RSVP Polk
- Courtney Simmons, MSN, RN, R.T.(R), CCRN, TNCC – Lakeland Regional Health
- Jennifer Singleton, BSN, RN – Central Florida Health Care
- Dorothy Smith – Polk County Fire Rescue
- Gwen Stanislawski – Lakeland Police Department
- Sarah Swartz – Swim Dynamic, LLC
- Tanesha Thomas – Florida Department of Health in Polk County/Healthy Start
- Christine Tufts – Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands, and Polk Counties, Inc.
- Chief Stephen Walker – Bartow Police Department
- Alicia Weaver – Children’s Advocacy Center
- Amanda Wilson – Florida Department of Children and Families
- Mark Young – Florida Department of Health in Polk County
- Benjamin J. Ziskal, AICP, CEcD – Polk County BOCC