

Big Bend Health Council  
Annual Report to the Boards of County Commissioners  
June 30, 2025



Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty,  
Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, and Washington Counties

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Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty,  
Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, and Washington Counties

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## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the Boards of County Commissioners with an overview, and a few examples, of Big Bend Health Council's work over the current fiscal year which ends June 30, 2025.

All our efforts continue our ongoing participation in and assistance to numerous community, regional, and statewide organizations to support and advance the goals of Florida's State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) and the Community Health Improvement Partnerships (CHIPs) of the counties in the Big Bend area. In addition, Big Bend Health Council disseminated information provided by our partners to other organizations in our network.

This ongoing and extensive communication strengthens the network of health-promoting initiatives across the fourteen counties in our area. Our service area covers a large geographic area - the length of our area (greater than the distance from Panama City to Perry) is more than 145 miles and the width (e.g. from Apalachicola to Malone) is at least 112 miles.

The Council participates in and supports a wide range of local and regional health-related organizations – each of which functions independently, with schedules, protocols, and procedures that meet their own needs and the needs of the communities they serve. To be of the greatest benefit, the Council seeks to serve and adapt to the needs of each group. Each group communicates and produces documents such as notifications, agendas, minutes, etc. in their own way. Communication via Zoom, Teams, telephone, and email are critical to our ability to serve such diverse organizations across a large and diverse geographic area. The description of services and activities in this report reflects the diverse of priorities of these partner organizations.

While this report provides an overview of the Council, it also includes some specific examples of recent activities and projects.



## Who we are

In 1982, the Florida Legislature established Florida's 11 Local Health Councils to support a wide range of public health services for Florida's 67 counties.

The Councils are governed by the Boards of Commissions of the counties they serve.

Big Bend Health Council was designated to serve Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, and Washington Counties.

While each Local Health Council focuses on the needs of its region, all share a common purpose - to improve community health and enhance statewide public health efforts.

## Florida's Big Bend Area

Our service area covers 14 counties in Florida's Big Bend. The length of our area (greater than the distance from Panama City in Bay County to Perry in Taylor County) is more than 145 miles. The width of our area, e.g. from Apalachicola in Franklin County to Malone in Jackson County, is at least 112 miles – at least 15,000 square miles.

Most of our counties, except for Bay and Leon are mostly rural, with a total population of approximately 770,000. Bay and Leon Counties are the most populous. All the others have fewer than 50,000 residents.

Area	Population 2023
Bay	190,769
Calhoun	13,470
Franklin	12,594
Gadsden	43,833
Gulf	15,693
Holmes	19,944
Jackson	48,622
Jefferson	15,450
Leon	296,913
Liberty	7,706
Madison	18,519
Taylor	21,582
Wakulla	36,449
Washington	25,602
Total	767,146



## Mission and Vision

### Mission

We are committed to improving the health and wellness of our communities through planning, direct services, advocacy, and education.

### Vision

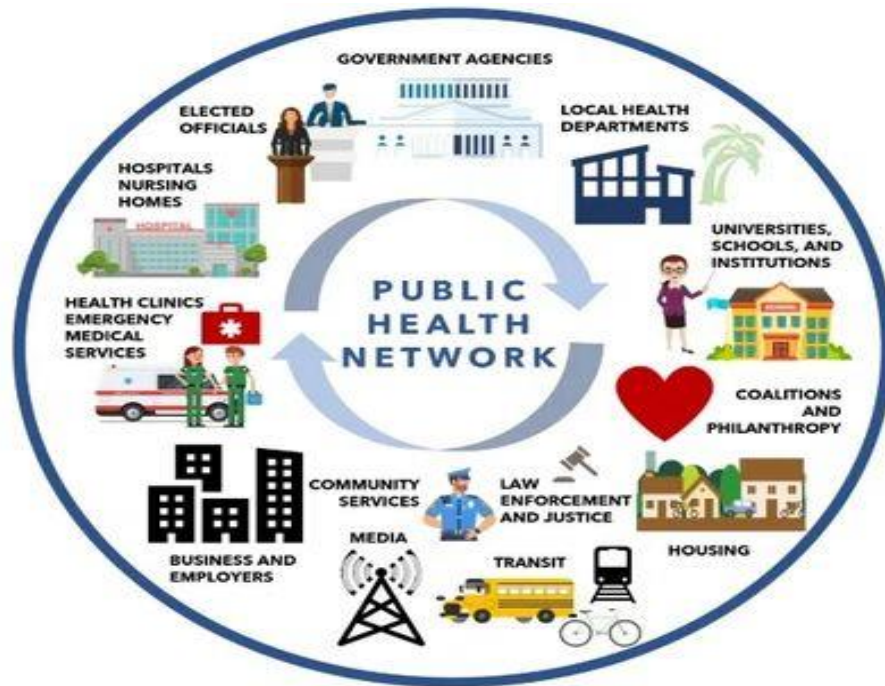
Every individual and family will have the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life in a community with equal access to services which promote health and wellness.

## What we do

- Promote alignment between the state's health priorities and those of the Big Bend area.
- Implement policies and programs that improve health and wellness.
- Conduct assessments to identify and prioritize community health needs.
- Write funding proposals and manage funding with sound fiscal practices.
- Plan, implement, and manage local initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles.
- Facilitate access to affordable and effective healthcare services.
- Disseminate reliable health information to the public.
- Provide technical assistance to community health projects to improve their effectiveness.

## How we do it

We partner with a wide range of organizations and entities with similar or supportive missions and visions.



## Florida Agency for Healthcare Administration aka AHCA.

The Florida Agency for Healthcare Administration aka AHCA is an important part of the Public Health Network.

Among many other responsibilities, AHCA regulates the provision of Certificates of Need (CON) program aka CON program which requires certain health care providers to obtain state approval before offering certain new or expanded services. The program currently regulates freestanding inpatient hospice facilities, skilled nursing facilities, and intermediate care facilities for the developmentally disabled. To support AHCA's CON program, Big Bend Health Council:

- convenes public hearings if requested by a CON applicant or a substantially affected party.
- conducts site visits to monitor implementation of an approved project until it is licensed.
- collects, analyzes, and reports utilization data (e.g. admissions, occupancy, payor source, etc.) for 32 nursing homes on a quarterly basis.
- These data are also available to CON applicants to inform their short-term and long-term planning and marketing efforts.

## Community Partnerships

Everything we do is with and for our communities.



As a community partner, we provide data-driven planning and technical assistance aimed at improving public health.

Together we strive to understand our communities' needs, develop plans, and implement strategies to meet those needs.



## County Health Profiles

To support our partners' ongoing assessment, planning, and implementation efforts, the Council publishes annual County Health Profiles highlighting key demographic and health indicators. The Profiles provide a snapshot of strengths and vulnerabilities of each county in comparison to the state as a whole.

All 11 of the state's Local Health Councils publish similar Profiles for their counties using a common core of data sets including:

- Population by age range
- Population by race, Hispanic ethnicity, and sex
- Per capita income
- Median income
- Persons less than 100% of the federal poverty level
- Unemployment
- High school graduation or higher
- Bachelor's degree or higher
- Free and reduced price lunch for students
- Maternal and child health data sets
- Non-elderly uninsured
- Health Professional Shortage Areas
- Medically Underserved Areas
- Deaths by all causes
- Leading causes of death
- Nursing home utilization

Please let us know if you would like us to add another category of data to these Profiles.

Profiles for all 14 counties are available on our website at [bigbendhealthcouncil.org](http://bigbendhealthcouncil.org).

Examples of the most recent County Health Profiles are on the next four pages.

## Liberty County's 2025 County Health Profile

The 2025 Profile of Liberty County on this and the next page.

As you can see across the top are counts and rates of the population by age range, race, ethnicity, and sex for Liberty County compared to Florida.


One level down are socioeconomic and maternal and child health data, again for Liberty County compared to Florida.

The socioeconomic indicators for Liberty show lower income and education, and higher rate of poverty than the state as whole, despite similar low unemployment rates.

### COUNTY HEALTH PROFILE

### LIBERTY COUNTY 2025

#### DEMOGRAPHICS



Age Range	2023	
	Liberty	Florida
Total & Percent		
Total Pop	7,706	22,610,726
0-17	17.7%	19.4%
18-64	64.6%	58.9%
65+	17.7%	21.7%

Source: US Census Bureau; QuickFacts, Population estimates July 1, 2023, downloaded February 5, 2025, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>.

Category	2023			
	Liberty		Florida	
	Total & Percent			
Total Pop	7,706	100.0%	22,610,726	100%
Asian	46	0.6%	723,543	3.2%
Black	1,387	18.0%	3,821,213	16.9%
White	5,988	77.7%	17,342,427	76.7%
Other	285	3.7%	723,543	3.2%
Hispanic	593	7.7%	6,195,339	27.4%
Female	3,098	40.2%	11,508,860	50.9%
Male	4,608	59.8%	11,101,866	49.1%

Source: US Census Bureau; QuickFacts, Population estimates July 1, 2023, downloaded February 5, 2025, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>.

#### SOCIOECONOMICS

Indicator	Liberty	Florida
Per Capita Income <sup>1</sup>	\$25,693	\$41,055
Median Household Income <sup>1</sup>	\$53,824	\$71,711
% of Persons < 100% FPL <sup>1</sup>	20.8%	12.3%
Unemployment Rate <sup>2</sup>	3.4%	3.1%
% high school grad or > <sup>1</sup>	79.0%	89.6%
% bachelor's degree or > <sup>1</sup>	15.8%	33.2%
# & Rate of Free or Reduced Price Lunch with USDA Multiplier if Applicable; Rate with Multiplier if Applicable <sup>3</sup>	877; 70.2%	1,830,291; 64%

Sources: <sup>1</sup> Per Capita income in past 12 months (in 2023 dollars) 2019-2023 and Median Household income (in 2023 dollars), 2019-2023; high school grad and bachelor's degree percent of persons age 25 years+, 2019-2023; US Census Bureau, Florida QuickFacts downloaded February 5, 2025. <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics Program, in cooperation with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Labor Market Statistics. December 2024 (not seasonally adjusted), released January 24, 2025. <sup>3</sup> Florida Department of Education, Fldoe.org, Lunch Status by District (for Federal Funding) 2024-25 Final Survey, downloaded February 5, 2025.

#### MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Maternal and Child Health 2023	Liberty	Florida
	Count and Rate	
Total Births (Resident Live Birth Rate per 1,000 Pop.)	85; 10.4	221,413; 9.8
Teen Births (Ages 15-19) (Rate per 1,000)	8; 41.0	8,109; 12.8
Repeat Births (to Ages 15-19)	1; 12.5%	1,042; 12.8%
Low Birth Weight (<2500 g)	8; 9.4%	20,055; 9.1%
Care Initiated in 3rd Trimester	4; 5.0%	13,416; 6.3%
No prenatal care	0	7,658; 3.6%
Infant Deaths (Rate per 100,000)	0	718; 329.1
Kindergartners Immunized	101; 98.1%	203,920; 90.6%

Source: Florida Department of Health, CHARTS, downloaded February 10, 2025.



Apalachicola Bluffs & Ravines Preserve

## (continued) Liberty County's 2025 County Health Profile

In the HealthCare Access section below, you can see counts and rates of non-elderly uninsured for most years from 2010 to 2022. Data from 2010 show that at the beginning of the Affordable Care Act, Liberty's rate of uninsured was 21.6% and Florida's rate was 25.3%. By 2022, Liberty's rate had dropped to 15.9% and Florida's rate was down to 13.9%, which was still higher than the national rate of 10.2%.

The section to the right summarizes the Health Professional Shortage Areas and Medically Underserved Areas for primary, dental, and mental health care. Liberty County has several designations, and PanCare of Florida provides all those services to residents of Liberty County. These designations are part of the documentation needed to establish PanCare as a Federally Qualified Health Center and are also used by other providers in their funding proposals.

In the section "Leading Causes of Death" we can see that the overall age-adjusted death rate, as well as for rates for four of Liberty's leading causes of death are higher than those of the state.

Ordinarily we include nursing home utilization data for counties with nursing homes, but Liberty doesn't have any nursing homes, so that section is omitted.

### HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Non-Elderly (Age 0-64) Uninsured				
Non-Elderly Uninsured	Liberty		Florida	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2010	1,219	21.6%	3.9 million	25.3%
2013	1,203	22.3%	3.8 million	24.3%
2014	969	18.4%	3.2 million	20.2%
2016	754	14.5%	2.5 million	15.4%
2018	706	13.7%	2.7 million	16.1%
2019	738	14.6%	2.7 million	16.4%
2020	812	16.4%	2.6 million	15.5%
2021	760	16.0%	2,534,999	15.1%
2022	761	15.9%	2,376,013	13.9%

Note: Per National Health Statistics Reports, Number 194, November 9, 2023. US rate in 2022 was 10.2%.

Source: US Census Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (for states and counties) 2022 data downloaded February 5, 2025.

Health Professional Shortage Areas & Medically Underserved Areas and Populations	
Primary Care; Mental Health	
Geographic HPSA: Liberty County	
Correctional Facility: Liberty Correctional Institution	
Federally Qualified Health Center: PanCare of Florida, Inc.	
Dental Health	
Low Income Population HPSA: Liberty County	
Correctional Facility: Liberty Correctional Institution	
Federally Qualified Health Center: PanCare of Florida, Inc.	
Medically Underserved Areas (MUAs)/Populations	
MUA: Liberty County	

Source: Health Resources and Services Administration, February 6, 2025.

### NURSING HOME UTILIZATION

no nursing homes in Liberty County

### LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH

2023				
Cause	Liberty			Florida
	Deaths	Crude Rate	Age-Adjusted Death Rate	Age-Adjusted Death Rate
All Causes	84	1,031.4	875.2	671.5
Heart Disease	18	221.0	188.7	135.6
Cancer	14	171.9	126.4	133.4
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	10	122.8	107.3	30.2
Unintentional Injury	6	73.7	68.9	63.9
Stroke	4	49.1	46.5	44.6

Source: Florida Department of Health, CHARTS, downloaded February 6, 2025.



Apalachicola Bluffs & Ravines Preserve

## Washington County' Community Health Profile

On this and the next page is the 2025 County Health Profile for Washington County. As in the profile for Liberty County, at the top, you can see the section on demographics showing the total and rate of population by age, race, ethnicity, and sex of Washington compared to Florida's rates.

As in Liberty County, the socioeconomic indicators for Liberty show lower income and education, and higher rate of poverty than the state as whole, despite similar low unemployment rates. Notice that the rate of free or reduced lunch is 73.8% compared to 64% for the state of Florida.

The data relevant to maternal and child health includes the actual counts as well as the rates because with small counts in rural populations, rates can be misleading.

### COUNTY HEALTH PROFILE

### WASHINGTON COUNTY 2025

#### DEMOGRAPHICS



Age Range	2023	
	Washington	Florida
	Total & Percent	
Total Pop	25,602	22,610,726
0-17	20.2%	19.4%
18-64	60.8%	58.9%
65+	19.0%	21.7%

Source: US Census Bureau; QuickFacts, Population estimates July 1, 2023, downloaded February 5, 2025, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>.

Category	2023			
	Washington		Florida	
	Total & Percent			
Total Pop	25,602	100.0%	22,610,726	100%
Asian	205	0.8%	723,543	3.2%
Black	3,405	13.3%	3,821,213	16.9%
White	20,765	81.1%	17,342,427	76.7%
Other	1,229	4.8%	723,543	3.2%
Hispanic	1,050	4.1%	6,195,339	27.4%
Female	12,136	47.4%	11,508,860	50.9%
Male	13,468	52.6%	11,101,866	49.1%

Source: US Census Bureau; QuickFacts, Population estimates July 1, 2023, downloaded February 5, 2025, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>.

#### SOCIOECONOMICS

Indicator	Washington	Florida
Per Capita Income <sup>1</sup>	\$26,233	\$41,055
Median Household Income <sup>2</sup>	\$52,723	\$71,711
% of Persons < 100% FPL <sup>2</sup>	16.8%	12.3%
Unemployment Rate <sup>3</sup>	3.4%	3.1%
% high school grad or > <sup>1</sup>	83.1%	89.6%
% bachelor's degree or > <sup>1</sup>	12.5%	33.2%
# & Rate of Free or Reduced Price Lunch with USDA Multiplier if Applicable; Rate with Multiplier if Applicable <sup>3</sup>	2,425; 73.8%	1,830,291; 64%

Sources: <sup>1</sup> Per Capita income in past 12 months (in 2023 dollars) 2019-2023 and Median Household income (in 2023 dollars), 2019-2023; high school grad and bachelor's degree percent of persons age 25 years+, 2019-2023; US Census Bureau, Florida QuickFacts downloaded February 5, 2025. <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics Program, in cooperation with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Labor Market Statistics. December 2024 (not seasonally adjusted), released January 24, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Florida Department of Education, Fldoe.org, Lunch Status by District (for Federal Funding) 2024-25 Final Survey, downloaded February 5, 2025.

#### MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Maternal and Child Health 2023	Washington	Florida
	Count and Rate	
Total Births (Resident Live Birth Rate per 1,000 Pop.)	258; 10.0	221,413; 9.8
Teen Births (Ages 15-19) (Rate per 1,000)	18; 25.1	8,109; 12.8
Repeat Births (to Ages 15-19)	6; 33.6%	1,042; 12.8%
Low Birth Weight (<2500 g)	9; 3.5%	20,055; 9.1%
Care Initiated in 3rd Trimester	11; 4.7%	13,416; 6.3%
No prenatal care	6; 2.6	7,658; 3.6%
Infant Deaths (Rate per 100,000)	0	718; 329.1
Kindergartners Immunized	290; 92.1%	203,920; 90.6%

Source: Florida Department of Health, CHARTS, downloaded February 10, 2025.



Seacrest Wolf Preserve, Chipley



## (continue) Washington County' Community Health Profile

In the section “Healthcare Access” you can see that in 2010 at the beginning of the Affordable Care Act, the rate for non-elderly uninsured in Washington was 21.9% and 25.3% in Florida. By 2022, Washington’s rate had dropped to 16.7% and Florida’s had dropped to 13.9%, which is still higher than the national rate of 10.2%.

In the table regarding Health Professional Shortage Areas and Medically Underserved Areas, you can see that Washington County has shortage areas in every category, primary care, dental health, and mental health. And again, Pan Care of Florida provides those services, these designations are part of the documentation needed to establish PanCare as a Federally Qualified Health Center, and are also used by other providers in their funding requests.

In the section on leading causes of death you can see that the age adjusted death rate for all causes and the leading causes of death in Washington County are higher than the rate in Florida as a whole.

In the section on Nursing Home Utilization, you can see that during the most recent fiscal year, Washington Nursing and Rehabilitation Center had 180 beds and their occupancy was 86.1%, their total admissions was 306, 77 Medicaid admissions and 97 Medicare admissions. The Medicare admissions were likely for patients who needed rehabilitation care after hospitalization because typically, Medicare does not pay for skilled nursing care.

### HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Non-Elderly (Age 0-64) Uninsured				
Non-Elderly Uninsured	Washington		Florida	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2010	4,043	21.9%	3.9 million	25.3%
2012	3,609	19.9%	3.7 million	24.1%
2014	3,323	19.0%	3.2 million	20.2%
2016	2,644	15.0%	2.5 million	15.4%
2018	2,825	15.7%	2.7 million	16.1%
2020	3,672	20.0%	2.6 million	15.5%
2021	3,199	17.4%	2,534,999	15.1%
2022	3,110	16.7%	2,376,013	13.9%

Note: Per National Health Statistics Reports, Number 194, November 9, 2023, US rate in 2022 was 10.2%.

Source: US Census Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (for states and counties) 2022 data downloaded February 5, 2025.

Health Professional Shortage Areas & Medically Underserved Areas and Populations	
Primary Care	
High Needs Geographic HPSA: Washington County	
Correctional Facility: NW Florida Reception Center	
Federally Qualified Health Center: PanCare of Florida, Inc.	
Dental Health	
Low Income Population HPSA: Washington County	
Correctional Facility: NW Florida Reception Center	
Federally Qualified Health Center: PanCare of Florida, Inc.	
Mental Health	
High Needs Geographic HPSA: Big Bend MH Catchment Area Circuit 14	
Correctional Facility: NW Florida Reception Center	
Federally Qualified Health Center: PanCare of Florida, Inc.	
Medically Underserved Areas/Populations	
Primary Care Medically Underserved Area: Washington County	

Source: Health Resources and Services Administration, February 6, 2025.

### LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH

Cause	2023			
	Washington			Florida
	Deaths	Crude Rate	Age-Adjusted Death Rate	Age-Adjusted Death Rate
All Causes	351	1,356.7	1,079.1	671.5
Heart Disease	90	347.9	279.1	135.6
Cancer	70	270.6	202.8	133.4
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	27	104.4	80.7	30.2
Unintentional Injury	20	77.3	75.8	63.9
Diabetes	18	69.6	53.1	21

Source: Florida Department of Health, CHARTS, downloaded February 6, 2025.

### NURSING HOME UTILIZATION

Nursing Homes	
Washington Nursing and Rehabilitation Center	
Beds: 180	
Occupancy: 86.1%	
Average Daily Census: 154.9	
Total Admissions: 306	
Medicaid Admissions: 77	
Medicare Admissions: 97	

Note: This section contains data only for those nursing homes that entered data (for July 2023 - June 2024) into the Data Warehouse.

Source: Broward Regional Health Planning Council, Florida Health Data Warehouse; July 2023 - June 2024; downloaded February 14, 2025.

## Community Partners

As you can see in this section, we partner with a wide range of community, regional, and state organizations to identify community health needs and develop solutions to meet those needs. Sometimes the partnership is ongoing and sometimes for a specific project or to respond to a request for technical assistance



## Some of Our Community Partners

Florida Department of Health  
Florida Agency for Healthcare Administration (AHCA)  
PanCare of Florida  
Florida Diabetes Alliance  
Rural Communities Opium Response Partnership (RCORP)  
Big Bend Area Health Education Center (AHEC)  
Franklin County Tobacco Free Partnership  
Gulf County Tobacco Free Partnership  
Doorways of Northwest Florida  
Healthy Holmes Task Force  
Panhandle Health Alliance  
Jackson County Community Health Improvement Partnership  
Washington County Community Health Improvement Partnership  
Franklin County Community Health Improvement Partnership  
Gulf County Community Health Improvement Partnership  
Calhoun County Community Health Improvement Partnership  
Taylor County Community Health Improvement Partnership  
University of Florida  
Florida Department of Children and Families

## Rural Health Strategic Planning Partnership

*to develop, implement and maintain a Statewide Rural Health Plan*

Draft vision:

A future where rural Floridians lead the nation in health outcomes,  
empowered by innovative, strategic, and transparent collaborations  
among all rural health stakeholders.

In 2024, the Florida Department of Health established the Rural Health Strategic Planning Partnership and included participation by all the Local Health Councils as one of the deliverables in our DoH contract.

In addition to the Department of Health as the lead, the Partnership meets once a month, and includes:

- All 11 Local Health Councils, including Big Bend - representing Florida's 67 counties and providing input and technical assistance to the Partnership.
- Rural Health Network representing:
  - Federally Qualified Health Centers
  - county health departments
  - rural health clinics
  - regional community mental health centers
  - primary care practices
  - hospitals
  - regional hospices
  - and the regional Area Health Education Center (Big Bend AHEC).

We expect work on this project to continue in the new fiscal year which starts July 1.



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## The Gulf County Tobacco Free Partnership

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Another one of our partners is The Gulf County Tobacco Free Partnership.

Gulf County Tobacco Free Partnership is a coalition of community members actively working to change the perception among local youth that tobacco use is a normal activity. The group consists of a wide array of adults from both the public and private sector, local youth leaders, and members of the general public.

Big Bend Health Council:

- Serves as Secretary to the Partnership, sets up and records Zoom meetings, take notes, and prepare minutes.
- Provides relevant data and other reliable information to support the Partnership's priorities and goals.

The Partnership plays a vital role in promoting community health - as you could see in the County Health Profiles, deaths associated with tobacco use is still higher in the Big Bend area than in the state as a whole.

Supported by funds from major settlements of litigation against tobacco companies, all the Tobacco Free Partnerships throughout the state are devoted to preventing the unnecessary suffering and premature death associated with tobacco use.

We have a similar relationship with the Franklin County Tobacco Free Partnership and serve as their secretary and support that Partnership as well.

Some of the best parts of the tobacco partnerships are the Students Working Against Tobacco, aka SWAT groups. With a SWAT Coordinator, the students work together to promote the Tobacco Free message and serve as peer influencers at schools and within the community at large.

The photos at the top of the next page were taken during SWAT Christmas activities at one of the local nursing homes in Gulf County. During the holiday season, the group went to the nursing home carrying the Tobacco Free message, and bringing gifts and holiday cheer to the residents.



## Students Working Against Tobacco SWAT Christmas activities



Students Working Against Tobacco also participated in the Tupelo Honey Festival. And you can see, the students carried the Tobacco Free message, played SWAT themed games, and displayed and distributed tobacco free information.

## Gulf County Students Working Against Tobacco



SWAT also participated in Earth Day events. You can see they planted trees, made and displayed posters, shared tobacco free relevant information, and collected trash including more than 6 pounds of cigarette butts to support Earth Day.



## Gulf County Tobacco Free Partnership Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) Earth Day Events



Wherever they go, Students Working Against Tobacco are rays of sunshine and hope.





## Big Bend Area Health Education Center (AHEC)

[bigbendahec.org](http://bigbendahec.org) (850) 224-9340

Tobacco Free Florida Cessation Program

Serving all 14 Counties in the Big Bend Area

A notable example of the membership of the Gulf Coast Tobacco Free Partnership (as well as numerous other Tobacco Free Partnerships in other Big Bend counties) is the Big Bend Area Health Education Center. Like us, Big Bend AHEC serves all 14 counties in the Big Bend area.

Big Bend Health Council promotes AHEC's programs at other community meetings and posts a link to their website and some of their info on our website.

## Big Bend Area Health Education Center (AHEC)

### Tobacco Cessation Programs

Big Bend AHEC provides a broad range of services including The Tobacco Free Florida AHEC Program which offers free Group Quit classes to help quit tobacco for good. All Tobacco Cessation services at Big Bend AHEC are free of charge to the public

Each group is led by a trained specialist who guides participants through the quitting process. They help identify triggers and withdrawal symptoms and brainstorm ways to cope with them. Groups are hosted at locations such as local public community centers, libraries, and hospitals. Groups are also available virtually. Participants can join via Zoom on a phone, tablet, or computer, or call in by phone.

Big Bend AHEC also offers private groups at locations such as worksite and provides valuable tools to help quit tobacco:

- Preparing to quit tobacco with a quit plan
- Learning strategies and skills to deal with nicotine cravings to remain tobacco-free
- Dealing with slips
- Having the opportunity to share your experience with others in a friendly, respectful and supportive group setting
- FREE patches, gum, or lozenges, if medically appropriate
- An online interactive calendar to sign-up for single or multi-session groups

Florida's State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)  
and  
Community Health Improvement Partnerships  
and  
Community Health Improvement Plans

This section explains our role in some aspects of Florida's health planning process.

The Florida State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) identifies [priorities](#) and outlines goals for improving public health in Florida. Various stakeholders such as government agencies, healthcare providers, and community groups participate in this process.

Likewise, each County Health Improvement Partnership identifies [priorities](#) and develops a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) for improving public health in their own counties.

Big Bend Health Council is a member of several Community Health Improvement Partnerships.

The Florida Department of Health encourages County Health Improvement Partnerships to consider aligning their Plans with those of the SHIP.

Why Aligning Priorities is Important

Aligning the priorities of state and county plans is important because advocates and funders often prefer to support aligned proposals which offer state, multi-county, or regional solutions.

Many residents rely on state or federally supported resources and services in their own and neighboring counties. The kinds of services for which funding may be requested include:

- Primary, Tertiary, and Long-Term Care
- Maternal Health Care
- Behavioral Health Care
- Recreation, Education, Employment, Housing and other and other services that support individual and community health

## How we helped

Periodically, Big Bend Health Council studies and compares the priorities of SHIP and all 14 CHIPs in our area. Then we write about and share our findings with the Partnerships.

We knew that many of the Partnerships would be starting a new planning cycle in January 2025, and this would be a good time to consider aligning their priorities more closely with those of SHIP.

So last August, we wrote and subsequently distributed an update of our findings, *Health Priorities Identified in Florida's State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) and Big Bend Counties' Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs)*. This document is also available on our website at [bigbendhealthcouncil.org](http://bigbendhealthcouncil.org). An excerpt from this report is copied.

## Health Priorities Identified in SHIP and CHIPs

As you can see, the three most frequently identified priorities in the Big Bend area that align with Florida's priorities are highlighted in yellow for emphasis.

Notice that none of the counties identified **SHIP Priority 1** or **SHIP Priority 7** as one of their own.

- **SHIP Priority 1, Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias**  
No counties identified this as a priority.
- **SHIP Priority 2, Chronic Diseases and Conditions**  
All counties identified this as a priority.
- **SHIP Priority 3, Injury, Safety, and Violence**  
Leon identified this as a priority.
- **SHIP Priority 4, Maternal and Child Health**  
Jefferson, Leon, Madison identified this as a priority.
- **SHIP Priority 5, Mental Well-Being, and Substance Abuse Prevention**  
Bay, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, Washington identified this as a priority.
- **SHIP Priority 6, Social and Economic Conditions Impacting Health**  
Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Leon, Liberty, Taylor, Wakulla identified this as a priority.
- **SHIP Priority 7, Transmissible and Emerging Diseases**  
No counties identified this as a priority.

## What did we do next?

After learning that “Alzheimer’s Disease and other Dementias” was identified as a SHIP priority, Big Bend Health Council reviewed prevalence, hospital utilization, and mortality data to learn more about the effect of Alzheimer’s Disease and other Dementias (A&D) on the residents of the Big Bend Area.

We wrote and shared a report\* of our findings with many of our partners and encouraged them to consider addressing A&D in their Community Health Improvement Plans.

So far, we have learned that at least 3 partnerships have done so, and revised their Plans to include goals related to A&D.

Data relevant to A&D in the Big Bend area are summarized in tables on the following pages.

*\*see Florida SHIP and County Partnerships CHARTS Data, Federal & State Planning & Policy Guidance on our website at [bigbendhealthcouncil.org](http://bigbendhealthcouncil.org)*

## Alzheimer’s and Organic Dementia in Florida and the Big Bend Counties

Notice that the tables on the following pages show data for Florida, each of the counties in the Big Bend area, and Big Bend as a whole

Please keep in mind that with our relatively small rural populations, rates are based on small numbers and may not be meaningfully comparable to rates for larger populations.

In the first section on the left, you can see that there were 14,318 probable Alzheimer's cases among adults age 65 and older in the Big Bend, approximately 10% of the population in that age range, almost the same as Florida's rate of 11%.

In the second section from the left, there were 555 emergency department visits from or with Alzheimer's disease as any listed diagnosis. You can see the rates varied widely from 26 per 100k population in Bay to 183 per 100k population in Calhoun. Florida's rate was 41 per 100k population.

In the section on the right, you can see data regarding emergency department visits from or with organic dementia as any listed diagnosis. Organic dementia includes vascular dementia and unspecified dementia, but excludes Alzheimer's Disease, dementia caused by other diseases, or dementia induced by substances. In 2022 in the Big Bend there were 2,149 emergency department visits from or with organic dementia as any listed diagnosis. Again rates varied widely from 159 per 100k in Madison to 515 per 100k in Calhoun. Florida's rate was 194 per 100k.

We brought these data to the attention of the Community Health Improvement Partnerships in our area.

**Alzheimer's and Organic Dementia in Florida and the Big Bend Counties  
Prevalence (2023) and Emergency Department (ED) Visits (2022)**

Area	Probable Alzheimer's Cases (Aged 65 Years and Older)		ED Visits From or With Alzheimer's Disease as Any Listed Diagnosis		ED Visits From or With Organic Dementia <sup>1</sup> as Any Listed Diagnosis	
	Count	% of pop 65+, 2023	Count	Rate per 100K pop, 2022	Count	Rate per 100K pop, 2022
Florida	547,614	11	14,362	41	67,753	194
Bay	3,649	11	60	26	394	168
Calhoun	301	11	35	183	95	515
Franklin	347	10	9	51	55	259
Gadsden	915	10	30	50	148	256
Gulf	388	10	10	38	45	177
Holmes	447	11	13	45	91	309
Jackson	1,184	12	62	89	141	198
Jefferson	385	10	11	47	67	277
Leon	4,628	10	245	87	763	274
Liberty	137	10	6	81	35	475
Madison	419	10	7	30	41	154
Taylor	495	10	26	85	80	265
Wakulla	553	9	29	100	88	280
Washington	470	11	12	44	106	363
BB Total	14,318		555		2,149	

<sup>1</sup> Organic dementia includes vascular dementia and unspecified dementia, but excludes Alzheimer's Disease, dementia caused by other diseases, or dementia induced by substances.

Note: Rates rounded to nearest whole number.

Source: Florida Department of Health CHARTS, data downloaded September 2024.

While data in the table above were relevant to prevalence and emergency department visits, the data in the table on the next page are relevant to hospitalizations and deaths.

In 2022, in the Big Bend area there were

- 626 Hospitalizations from or with Alzheimer's
- 4,098 Hospitalizations from or with Organic Dementia
- 6,706 Deaths from or with Alzheimer's
- 8,193 Deaths from or with Organic Dementia

As with Emergency Department visits, hospitalization and death rates varied widely from county to county. Altogether, these data suggest the continued need for specialized resources and services to care for and support affected patients, families, and communities. Caregivers, first responders, and healthcare providers may need specific training and continuing education to prepare for and adapt to the challenges associated with Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias.

### Alzheimer's and Organic Dementia in Florida and the Big Bend Counties Hospitalizations and Deaths

Area	Hospitalizations from or with Alzheimer's Disease as any listed diagnosis		Hospitalizations from or with Dementia as any Listed Diagnosis		Deaths from Alzheimer's Disease		Deaths from Organic Dementia	
	Count	Rate per 100K pop, 2022	Count	Rate per 100K pop, 2022	Count	Rate per 100K pop, 2022	Count	Rate per 100K pop, 2022
Florida	32460	93	143921	411	6397	18	7914	23
Bay	117	51	1056	451	130	57	45	20
Calhoun	33	174	65	341	10	54	7	34
Franklin	6	37	65	353	2	12	5	33
Gadsden	42	72	370	627	9	16	26	46
Gulf	20	81	111	424	14	57	2	7
Holmes	10	33	77	269	11	38	4	14
Jackson	59	85	175	249	40	58	10	14
Jefferson	13	46	144	572	3	13	10	40
Leon	255	92	1553	548	53	19	112	42
Liberty	8	111	39	502	3	42	3	42
Madison	6	23	66	262	3	12	18	78
Taylor	13	43	97	314	7	25	14	49
Wakulla	27	95	160	502	10	30	18	60
Washington	17	64	120	402	14	54	5	20
BB Total	626		4098		6706		8193	

<sup>1</sup> Organic dementia includes vascular dementia and unspecified dementia, but excludes Alzheimer's Disease, dementia caused by other diseases, or dementia induced by substances.

Note: Rates rounded to nearest whole number.

Source: Florida Department of Health CHARTS, data downloaded September 2024.



## Association Between Opioid Use Disorder and Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia?

In addition to compiling Florida Department of Health CHAARTS data, we searched the peer reviewed literature on Pub Med, by entering a search “Alzheimer’s opioid disorder”.

One of the articles we came across suggests that the effects of Alzheimer’s Disease and other dementias are not limited to seniors.

The following excerpt of the article in the Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease, *Exploring the Association Between Opioid Use Disorder and Alzheimer’s Disease and Dementia Among a National Sample of the U.S. Population*, was copied on October 18, 2024 from PubMed.

This excerpt may have implications for some of the individuals, families, and communities affected by the opioid crisis in our area.

Highlights added by Big Bend Health Council.

**Results:** A sample of 627,810 individuals with OUD were compared to 646,340 without OUD. Individuals with OUD exhibited 88% higher risk for developing AD/dementia compared to those without OUD (aHR = 1.88, 95% CI 1.74, 2.03) within 1 year follow-up and 211% (aHR = 3.11, 95% CI 2.63, 3.69) within 10 years follow-up. When stratifying by age, younger patients (age 12-44) had a greater disparity in odds of AD/dementia between OUD and non-OUD groups compared with patients older than 65 years.

**Conclusions:** Additional research is needed to understand why an association exists between OUD and AD/dementia, especially among younger populations. The results suggest that cognitive functioning screening programs for younger people diagnosed with OUD may be useful for targeting early identification and intervention for AD/dementia in particularly high risk and marginalized populations.

This information is also included in the report we shared with many of our partners, including Community Health Improvement Partnerships, PanCare’s Behavioral Health Support Consortium, and the Rural Strategic Planning Partnership.

Providers treating OUD might consider that some level of dementia may be impairing patients’ ability to learn and practice the essential life skills and activities of daily living necessary to comply with treatment recommendations. If that is indeed a factor, assessments and effective treatment plans might need to include appropriate adaptations.

## Pulsara

For the past two months we've been partnering with the Pulsara project.

The purpose of the project is to encourage hospitals, fire, and emergency services throughout the state to utilize Pulsara as their emergency electronic communication & logistics platform. To incentivize statewide use of Pulsara, the Florida Department of Health is offering Pulsara at no cost to all hospitals, fire, and emergency services.

Florida's Department of Health Bureau of Emergency Medical Oversight asked all the Local Health Councils to host and facilitate virtual meetings with all the hospitals, fire departments, and emergency services in their areas. Big Bend agreed to do so for the Big Bend and Northeast Florida regions.

The purpose of the meetings would be to discuss, promote, and elicit feedback regarding Pulsara, which is the Department's emergency electronic communication & logistics platform.

Specifically, the Bureau of Emergency Medical Oversight asked us to contact, invite, convene, host, and facilitate virtual meetings between their Pulsara Project Manager and emergency personnel from all the hospitals, fire departments, and emergency services in the 21 counties in the Big Bend and Northeast Florida areas. Over the past two months we contacted and recruited participation from 124 providers, and during the last two weeks in June, we convened, hosted, and facilitated 4 meetings - 2 meetings in each of the 2 regions.

The meetings were informative and encouraged questions from personnel unfamiliar with Pulsara as well as feedback from those who were already using it.

### What is Pulsara?

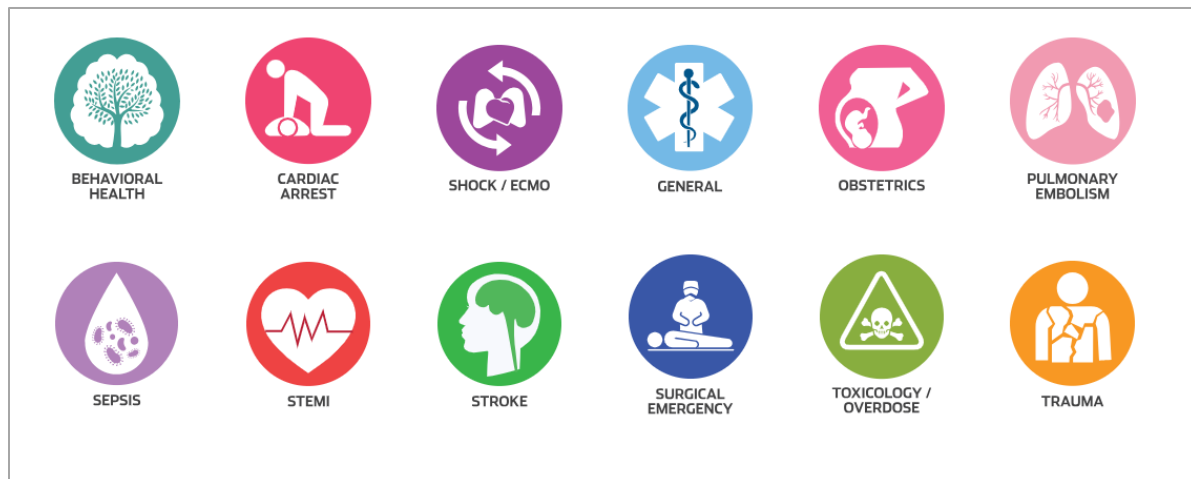
Pulsara is a secure, user-friendly app that unites the entire care team, even across different departments or organizations. By replacing multiple phone calls, radio reports, faxes, and pagers with one unified patient channel, Pulsara streamlines workflows, leading to reduced treatment times, lower costs, and enhanced experiences for both patients and caregivers.

### Who uses Pulsara?

From EMS and hospital staff to urgent cares, nursing homes, testing clinics, standalone EDs, Public Health, and even FEMA Medical Operations Coordination Cells, Pulsara connects all members of the care team, regardless of location, organization, or position. Pulsara unites all care team members within and across organizations for any patient event and every method of arrival.

From EMS and hospital staff to urgent cares, nursing homes, testing clinics, standalone local enforcement, public health, and even FEMA medical Operations coordination cells, Pulsara connects all members of the care team, regardless of location, organization or position. Pulsara unites all care team members within and across organizations for any patient events and every method of arrival.

Examples of some of the venues, settings, and conditions for which effective and reliable communication is critically important.



### Who did the Department of Health want us to engage?

The Department's priorities were individuals with medical oversight of trauma and stroke centers, but they also wanted to encourage participation of the following:

- Hospital Chief Executive Officers
- Hospital Chief Operations Officers
- Hospital Chief Medical Officers
- Hospital Chief Nursing Officers
- Hospital Development Directors
- Hospital Information Technology Directors
- Emergency Department Leadership
- Trauma Medical Directors
- Trauma Program Managers
- Stroke Program Medical Leadership
- Stroke Program Managers
- Hospital Emergency Management Directors
- Local Fire/EMS Officials
- County/municipal emergency management.

Over the past two months, we contacted and invited trauma, stroke, and emergency staff from 124 organizations to attend one of four scheduled Zoom meetings, 2 in each area.

Big Bend Health Council hosted four Zoom meetings by June 25th.

The final phase of this project will be writing up summaries of the meetings including the questions and input from participants.

For more information about Pulsara, please see their website at [pulsara.com](http://pulsara.com).

Project Counties		Organizations	Big Bend	NE Florida	Total
Big Bend	NE Florida		14 counties	7 counties	21 counties
Bay	Baker	Hospitals	21	40	61
Calhoun	Clay	Fire Departments	14	7	21
Franklin	Duval	Emergency Management Services (EMS)	14	7	21
Gadsden	Flagler	County Emergency Management	14	7	21
Gulf	Nassau	Total	63	61	124
Holmes	St. Johns				
Jackson	Volusia				
Jefferson					
Leon					
Liberty					
Madison					
Taylor					
Wakulla					
Washington					

Big Bend Health Council hosted & facilitated 4 Zoom meetings

For more information about Pulsara, see their website at [www.pulsara.com](http://www.pulsara.com)



## What's next

Our new fiscal year starts July 1. In addition to continuing many of the activities and partnerships we already discussed, we anticipate a new 5-year contract to continue developing Diabetes Self-Management Education Programs throughout Florida. We started working with this successful project approximately 8 years ago, and hope to receive funding to resume this project and our partnership with:

- Florida Department of Health
- Florida Department of Health
- Florida Diabetes Alliance (we will also continue to serve as Liaison between the Florida Diabetes Alliance Board of Directors and the Community Health Improvement Partnerships in the Big Bend Area.
- Health Planning Council of SW Florida
- Well Florida Council
- Entities which seek mentoring and support to develop accredited Diabetes Self-Management Education Programs.

Website and Documents  
[bigbendhealthcouncil.org](http://bigbendhealthcouncil.org)

Examples of some of the documents we've shared with our partners that can be downloaded from our website:

- 2025 County Health Profiles
- Health Priorities *Identified in Florida's State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) and Big Bend Counties' Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPS)*
- Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias *Florida SHIP and County Partnerships, CHARTS Data, Federal & State Planning & Policy Guidance*

There are many other partners with whom we've interacted over this past year. In this report we've shared some details about some of them.

*Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or  
would like additional information.*

*Thank you for your continued support*