Supporting our community in times of crisis and beyond

A Lifetime of Health, Together – our vision, rooted in our mission, propels us forward. As the leading health care system in Northeast Florida, we are committed to actions that address priority needs of vulnerable and underserved women, men and children throughout the communities we serve.

In our response to COVID-19 as well as crises in the past, Baptist Health has looked inward, to ensure we provide the highest quality of care while maintaining the safety of our team members and patients. And we have looked outward, to the needs of our community, working with partners to address new needs for food, in-home supports, and mental and behavioral health care.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and Social Responsibility and Community Health Board Committee, we now share some of those efforts with you in this abbreviated 2019/2020 Report to the Community. We look forward to sharing more stories in the coming months.

Brett S. McClung, FACHE
President and Chief Executive Officer
Baptist Health
One of the devastating effects of COVID-19 is an increase in mental illness, drug and alcohol use.

Baptist Health emergency departments treat hundreds of patients each year who are suffering from mental illness, substance abuse or both. Duval and Nassau counties in particular have more than their share of overdose deaths.

So we asked ourselves: How can we go upstream, and help these community members receive the support they need before they spiral into crisis? The answer: By working with our community partners, Starting Point and Gateway Community Services.

With financial and staff support from Baptist Health, Starting Point helped us develop the processes and policies to transition overdose patients from the emergency room into outpatient services in Nassau County.

We expanded these efforts in September 2019 with Gateway Community Services Certified Peer Specialists on-site at our emergency department at Baptist North, which serves patients from Duval and Nassau counties.
Once an overdose patient has been stabilized medically at Baptist North, a nurse will ask the patient if they are interested in talking with a Peer. This connection is made possible through Project Save Lives, operated by Gateway Community Services with support from the City of Jacksonville.

Baptist North Assistant Nurse Manager Janie Cowart, RN, has seen the impact Peers can have for patients and team members. “Patients are reluctant to talk with medical professionals about their addiction,” she said. "Peers are able to speak from their own personal experience, and this results in many more patients entering treatment and being connected to recovery resources."

"Because the Peers have been where they are, our patients will open up with them, and many of them decide to get help.”

**The program works.** Not only are people getting help, they are overcoming their addictions.

- 52% decrease in overdoses among participants (Nov 2017 – Dec 2019)
- 14% decrease in emergency calls for overdoses (2018 -2019)

Thanks to our partnership with Starting Point and Gateway Community Services, we are prepared to address the increased need as a result of COVID-19.
Seniors were a particularly vulnerable population as the community sheltered in place.

As our community began to stay at home in mid-March 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19, teams at Baptist Health began reaching out to community partners and senior patients to ensure they were safe at home. Baptist Health Care Coordinators Blair Sisisky, MSW, a Social Worker II, and Rebecca Mayes, BSN, identified that many of their patients’ health needs are more than medical.

As we learned of unmet needs for food, our Social Responsibility team expanded support of organizations assisting with home-delivered meals and in-home services for seniors, filling in the gaps of federal support with financial and in-kind donations. Three of these organizations are the University of North Florida (UNF), Aging True and the Nassau County Council on Aging.

Lauri Wright, PhD, assistant professor and Chair of the Nutrition and Dietetics department at UNF leads its Meals on Wings initiative. Student volunteers pick up unused food prepared for sale in Baptist hospital cafeterias and repackage it for delivery to seniors. More than 5,000 meals were delivered in 2019 to homebound seniors in Duval County, and during the first few months of 2020, Meals on Wings delivered meals to an additional 80 seniors.

To ensure that food arrives fresh, Baptist Health provided a commercial refrigerator and transportation bags to Meals on Wings to keep the food at safe temperatures.
Nassau County Council on Aging received federal support to increase the delivery of meals and groceries to seniors who were homebound to avoid contracting COVID-19. However, staff and refrigerated trucks were needed. Baptist Health provided the funding to rent refrigerated trucks and a staff member to enable food delivery. As a result, the Council on Aging has delivered food to **more than 750 seniors** since March 2020.

Aging True enables home-based senior independence in Northeast Florida by going into the home of each participant and completing an assessment to determine the services they need to stay healthy. Baptist Health pays for the assessment and the services provided for its patients. Aging True services include a Meals on Wheels program as well as in-home support services, such as the installation of equipment to ensure safety at home.

Community members who benefited from Aging True services joined a luncheon hosted by Baptist Health, and shared their experiences with us.

For example, Ethel Jackson feels safer at home now that Aging True has installed rails in her shower and on her bed. Thanks to the program, Rosemary Jones is receiving more cohesive and timely treatment versus long lapses in care. “I’m in a much better and safer situation now,” Jones said. “I worry less and have more peace of mind.”
As the only locally governed, mission-driven, not-for-profit health system in Northeast Florida, Baptist Health dedicates substantial resources to social responsibility and community health. And our team members also contribute their time and talent — giving back to our community and making a true difference in the lives of our neighbors in need.