



**St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital  
Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)  
Implementation Strategy**

*Lavonia, GA  
Fiscal Years FY26-28*



**Sacred Heart’s Hospital completed a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) that was adopted by the Board of Directors on February 3, 2025.** Sacred Heart performed the CHNA in adherence with applicable federal requirements for not-for-profit hospitals set forth in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The assessment considered a comprehensive review of secondary data analysis of patient outcomes, community health status, and social influencers of health, as well as primary data collection, including input from representatives of the community, community members and various community organizations.

The complete CHNA report is available electronically at <https://www.stmarys-health.org/about-us/community-benefit>

or printed copies are available at 367 Clear Creek Parkway, Lavonia, Georgia 30553.

## Our Mission

We, St. Mary’s Health Care System and Trinity Health, serve together in the spirit of the Gospel as a compassionate and transforming healing presence within our communities.

## Our Hospital

St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital serves the people of Franklin, Hart, and Stephens counties—and beyond—by providing mission-driven, high-quality healthcare and is dedicated to offering advanced medical services close to home.

## Our Community-Based Services

### Breast Health Services

The St. Mary’s Breast Health Center offers preventative care, high-risk counseling, treatment—both surgical and medical, and read-a-graphic organized through one center.

### Cardiology

The St. Mary’s team provides a comprehensive array of diagnostic tests to identify heart-related ailments and a number of innovative procedures to treat them. St. Mary’s features advanced diagnostic tools like Cardiac MR, 3D echocardiography and 320-slice CT scanners.

### Center for Rehabilitative Medicine

St. Mary's CRM provides inpatient care and intensive physical and occupational therapy and speech-language pathology services to help patients who meet admission qualifications maximize their function and return to independent living. CARF accredited.

### Clinical Laboratory Services

St. Mary’s Laboratory Services provide a full range of state-of-the-art laboratory testing, from routine bloodwork to the diagnosis of pathogens and cancers. The laboratory is fully accredited by the College of American Pathologists and the American Association of Blood Banks.

### Diabetes Education Services

The Outpatient Diabetes Education Department at St. Mary’s is recognized by the American Diabetes Association and offers individual appointments followed by two diabetes education classes. These classes cover all aspects of diabetes self-management from nutrition to reducing risk of diabetes-related complications.

### Emergency Care

Open 24/7 for any medical emergency, including heart attack and stroke. St. Mary’s Hospital is Joint Commission

Certified as an Advanced Thrombectomy-Capable Primary Stroke Center and is accredited by the American College of Cardiology as a Chest Pain Center with Primary PCI.

### **Endocrinology**

St. Mary's Health Care System is a provider of Endocrinology and Diabetes care and offers a full range of treatment options for those with diseases of the Endocrine system.

### **Graduate Medical Education**

Partnering with the Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership, St. Mary's is the participating site for the Internal Medicine Residency Program, Northeast Georgia's first graduate medical education program. Up to 33 physician residents provide supervised care with increasing levels of independence as the final stage of their medical education. The program is designed to address Georgia's physician shortage and attract new doctors to our region.

### **Hospitalists**

St. Mary's created the region's first hospitalist program in 2002 to optimize care for inpatients. Athens Hospitalists Services is an independent group of board-certified internal medicine physicians dedicated to patient satisfaction.

### **Highland Hills**

St. Mary's Highland Hills Village Senior Living is a community of support, fellowship, and watchful oversight for active seniors, and offers a robust continuum of care including independent living, assisted living, and memory care.

### **Home Care and Hospice Services**

St. Mary's has a long-standing tradition of providing quality, compassionate care with dignity and respect both in the traditional hospital setting and in homes across Northeast Georgia

### **Infectious Disease Services**

St. Mary's provides infectious disease services including outpatient medical care for patients, immunizations and vaccinations, management of chronic illnesses, and specialist consults for other physicians.

### **Inpatient and Critical Care**

Acute care, pre- and post-operative, and restorative inpatient care are available for medical and surgical patients, along with palliative care services at all levels. Critical care services include dedicated medical/surgical intensive care (ICU), neurosciences critical care (NCCU), and level II neonatal intensive care (NICU). St. Mary's also provides an intermediate care unit (IMCU). In addition, Sacred Heart Hospital provides intensive care services.

### **Medical Imaging**

St. Mary's Radiology Department maintains state-of-the-art equipment with capabilities such as digital x-ray, digital mammography, CT, MRI and ultrasound. St. Mary's Hospital currently is expanding to create an additional MRI suite. The radiology department also offers convenient mammography and bone density services at St. Mary's Outpatient Diagnostic, Rehab and Wellness Center.

### **Military and Veterans Health Program (MilVet)**

The goal of the MilVet program is to provide military service members, veterans and their families with convenient access to high-quality, culturally sensitive, people-centered health care services that meet their specific needs.

### **Mission Services**

Mission Services is an integral part of St. Mary's commitment to caring. St. Mary's Mission Services encompasses Ethics, Spiritual Care, Spirituality in the Workplace, Formation, Language Services, and Patient Experience.

### **Neurology**

St. Mary's Neurological Specialists are committed to true clinical excellence in patient care, providing medical treatment which is grounded in progressive, evidence-based medicine, utilizing the most current innovations and technologies

### **Outpatient Infusion Suite**

St. Mary's Outpatient Infusion Suite can help patients of all ages manage a wide range of conditions such as anemia, asthma, Crohn's disease, immune deficiencies, psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis. Our skilled, compassionate registered nurses are trained to help patients maximize their health and avoid inpatient hospital stays.

### **Outpatient Services**

Offering a wide variety of outpatient services from radiology and diagnostics to rehabilitation, St. Mary's provides patients with convenience, high-quality care and the latest technology to fit into their active lifestyles.

### **Palliative Care Services**

St. Mary's Palliative Care Program is accessible to patients across Northeast Georgia. Care is provided by a team of expert specialists, led by a physician, that includes nurse practitioners, social workers, and chaplains. Services aim to provide relief from the symptoms and stresses of illness and to improve the patient's quality of life by focusing on the things that are most important to the patient and their family.

### **Respiratory Care**

St. Mary's Respiratory Care Department is available for any breathing-related need, from ventilator management in the critical care setting to outpatient breathing tests, smoking cessation, and a support group.

### **Rheumatology Services**

The Rheumatology Center of Athens, a St. Mary's collaboration with Padmanaidu Karnam, M.D., serves patients across Northeast Georgia who are living with arthritis and other autoimmune conditions.

### **Spine Care**

St. Mary's is the first hospital in the Athens area to earn The Joint Commission Gold Seal of Approval for Spine Surgery.

### **St. Mary's Stroke Center**

St. Mary's Hospital in Athens is the region's leading provider of comprehensive stroke care, offering 24/7 emergency services. Our advanced stroke care includes ischemic stroke interventions such as IV thrombolytics, commonly known as "clot busters," and cerebral thrombectomy, an endovascular procedure that removes clots from the brain.

### **Surgery and Robotics**

All three St. Mary's hospitals provide traditional and minimally invasive surgical systems delivered by highly experienced surgeons and teams. In addition, St. Mary's Hospital in Athens also offers three surgical robots – our region's most comprehensive range of robotic surgical services.

### **Virtual Care**

St. Mary's has avenues to connect with a provider using a computer, smartphone, or tablet for more basic appointments

### **Urgent Care**

St. Mary's Emergency Departments have walk-in treatment options for minor to moderate conditions.

### **Women and Maternity Services**

St. Mary's Hospital has the region's most spacious Family Birth Center, where most women can labor, deliver, recover and complete their post-partum stay in one room. St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital also offers a spacious and compassionate Mother-Baby Unit. We offer digital imaging capabilities in our Athens Women's Imaging Center, including 3D-mammography, MRI-guided breast biopsy, CT, ultrasound and breast health nurses. Convenient and private mammography, bone density and ultrasound services are available at St. Mary's Outpatient Diagnostic, Rehab and Wellness Center. St. Mary's Hospital also has a dedicated unit for women's urology and gynecology services.

### **Wound Center**

St. Mary's Center for Wound Healing provides a full-range of wound healing services in clean and modern outpatient facilities in Athens and Lavonia. Our physicians take a multidisciplinary approach to managing chronic, non-healing



wounds.

## Our Community

The geographic service area was defined at the county-level for the purposes of the 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The service area was determined by extracting patient-visit data. The service area counties accounted for the highest number of patient visits by county of residence using 2024 hospital data.

Five counties are defined as the service area for Sacred Heart Hospital: Banks, Elbert, Franklin, Hart and Stephens. The counties with the most patient visits are the "primary service region." The counties with the next highest patient visits are the "secondary service region." Sacred Heart Hospital has 56 beds at its Lavonia, Georgia location.

The total population for the service area in 2023 is 119,368. The total population per county within the service area and aggregated across all five counties are presented below in ascending order, from least to most populous county [2023 U.S. Census American Community Survey & County Quick Facts].

- Banks: 19,789
- Elbert: 20,013
- Franklin: 24,782
- Stephens: 27,228
- Hart: 27,556

### Service Area Demographics: Racial and Ethnic Composition

The majority of households in the Sacred Heart service area is listed as identifying as Non-Hispanic White (59%), followed by African American (31%), Hispanic (7%), Asian (1%), Other (3%). [2023 U.S. Census American Community Survey & County Quick Facts]

### Service Area Demographics: Household Income

The average median household income for residents within the Sacred Heart five-county service area was \$56,065. However, there is some disparity of median income by county: the lowest median income is in Elbert County (\$49,727), while the area's highest median income is in Banks County (\$68,830). There is also wealth disparity between racial groups as white households have significantly higher incomes than black households. This exposes the lack of financial mobility in communities of color. [County Health Rankings]

## Our Approach to Health Equity

While community health needs assessments (CHNA) and Implementation Strategies are required by the IRS, Trinity Health ministries have historically conducted CHNAs and developed Implementation Strategies as a way to meaningfully engage our communities and plan our Community Health & Well-Being work. Community Health & Well-Being promotes optimal health for people experiencing poverty or other vulnerabilities in the communities we serve by addressing patient social needs and investing in our communities through dismantling oppressive systems, including racism, and building community capacity. Trinity Health has adopted the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's definition of Health Equity: "Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care."

This implementation strategy was developed in partnership with our community and will focus on specific populations and geographies most impacted by the needs being addressed. Racial equity principles were used throughout the development of this plan and will continue to be used during the implementation. The strategies implemented will mostly focus on policy, systems and environmental change as these systems changes are needed to dismantle racism and promote health and wellbeing for all members of the communities we serve.

## Health and Social Needs of the Community

The CHNA conducted in late 2024 to early 2025 identified the significant needs for health and social drivers of health within the Sacred Heart community. Community stakeholders then prioritized those needs during a facilitated review and analysis of the CHNA findings. The significant health needs identified, in order of priority include:

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### 1. Healthcare Access

- Healthcare Access continues to be the dominant concern, reflecting challenges in accessing affordable, quality healthcare services. Barriers include insurance coverage gaps, limited availability of primary care providers, transportation difficulties, and language barriers. This disparity disproportionately affects low-income populations and minority groups, leading to delayed or forgone care, resulting in worse health outcomes. *(See CHNA, page 37-38).*

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### 2. Behavioral Health

- Behavioral Health (Mental and Substance Use): The CHNA reveals high rates of mental health conditions and substance abuse disorders. Stigma, lack of awareness, limited access to mental healthcare services, and affordability are significant obstacles to care. The intersection of behavioral health issues with other health conditions further complicates treatment and management. The growing opioid crisis further exacerbates this health need and warrants urgent attention. *(See CHNA, pages 39-40).*

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### 3. Maternal Health

- Maternal Health: The CHNA indicates disparities in maternal health outcomes, such as higher rates of premature births
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	and infant mortality among certain demographic groups. Access to quality prenatal care and postpartum support services is crucial for improving maternal health outcomes and reducing disparities. <i>(See CHNA, pages 41-42).</i>
4. Cardiovascular Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cardiovascular Disease: Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) remain a major health concern, contributing to high rates of hospitalization and mortality. Risk factors such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, smoking, and hypertension are prevalent. <i>(See CHNA, pages 43-44)</i></li> </ul>
5. Food Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food Insecurity: A substantial portion of the population experiences food insecurity, lacking consistent access to sufficient, nutritious food. This issue affects household health, contributing to chronic diseases, and exacerbating existing health disparities. <i>(See CHNA, page 45).</i></li> </ul>
6. Alzheimer's Disease & Related Dementia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia: The aging population within the service area is experiencing an increasing prevalence of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. The associated caregiving burden for families and the need for specialized services constitute a growing challenge for the health care system. <i>(See CHNA, pages 46-47).</i></li> </ul>
7. Diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diabetes in the service area causes serious complications such as heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure, significantly impacting residents' quality of life. This prevalence leads to increased healthcare utilization and substantial costs, placing a burden on both individuals and the healthcare system. <i>(See CHNA, pages 48-49).</i></li> </ul>

## Hospital Implementation Strategy

### Significant health and social needs to be addressed

Sacred Heart Hospital, in collaboration with community partners, will focus on developing and/or supporting initiatives and measure their effectiveness to improve:

- Health Care Access – CHNA pages 37-38

## Significant health and social needs that will not be addressed

St. Mary's acknowledges the wide range of priority health and social issues that emerged from the CHNA process and determined that it could effectively focus on only those needs which are the most pressing, under-addressed, and within its ability to influence. St. Mary's does not intend to address the following needs independently, but instead to focus on improving healthcare access, which may ultimately affect all significant needs identified:

- Behavioral Health
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Maternal Health
- Diabetes
- Alzheimer's Disease & Related Dementia
- Food Insecurity

The goal over the next three years will be to make impactful and measurable change through full execution of the implementation plan that will correspond with this CHNA. Throughout the qualitative focus groups and meetings with the Advisory Councils at each campus, urgency was consistently expressed by participants to address healthcare access. Access to care is foundational to improving health outcomes across all residents and populations in the service area. Improvements in access to care have the potential to improve the overall health of the community. Finally, all advisory council members recognized and agreed that intervening on healthcare access allows St. Mary's the flexibility to address all seven of the top health needs, given that access is tied to all healthcare outcomes for all people.

In each health need discussed and prioritized, access was the main concern of the focus group members, the advisory council, and a common theme found in quantitative data. By focusing on healthcare access, St. Mary's can create a more inclusive and comprehensive healthcare environment across the service area.

This implementation strategy specifies community health needs that Sacred Heart Hospital, in collaboration with community partners, has determined to address. The hospital reserves the right to amend this implementation strategy if circumstances warrant. For example, certain needs may become more pronounced and require enhancements to the described strategic initiatives. During these three years, other organizations in the community may decide to address certain needs, indicating that the hospital should refocus its limited resources to best serve the community.



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## Healthcare Access



**Goal:** Improve access to healthcare for patients and community members in the St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital service area--with special efforts made to increase access for the medically underserved.

CHNA Impact Measures	FY2026 Baseline	FY2028 Target
Number of free mammograms offered to un/underinsured women at Sacred Heart Hospital yearly	25	80
Number of physicians referred to provide care in Sacred Heart's rural community and address the lack of local providers, which results in reduced access to healthcare	1	3
Number of strategic partnerships with social service agencies to support better health outcomes for Sacred Heart community members.	0	2

Strategy	Timeline			Hospital and Committed Partners (align to indicate committed resource)	Committed Resources (align by hospital/committed partner)
	Y1	Y2	Y3		
Provide no-cost mammograms to un- and under-insured women at risk of breast cancer	X	X	X	Sacred Heart Hospital Medlink Georgia	Staff and expertise, Equipment Expertise
				Focus location(s)	Focus Population(s)
				Franklin and surrounding counties	Low-income women Minority women
Strategy	Timeline			Hospital and Committed Partners (align to indicate committed resource)	Committed Resources (align by hospital/committed partner)
	Y1	Y2	Y3		
Provide strategic support and partnership with social service agencies to support better whole health outcomes and to support their long-term health goals	X	X	X	Sacred Heart Hospital	Health education Staff time Financial contributions
				United Way organizations Community Resource Directory organizations	Staff Expertise
				Focus location(s)	Focus Population(s)
				Franklin and surrounding counties	Sacred Heart community members
Strategy	Timeline			Hospital and Committed Partners (align to indicate committed resource)	Committed Resources (align by hospital/committed partner)
	Y1	Y2	Y3		
Increase and expand vital healthcare services in this rural community by offering	X	X	X	Sacred Heart Hospital	Staff time and expertise Financial contributions
				Focus location(s)	Focus Population(s)

subsidized health services not offered elsewhere in the community while also recruiting the necessary physicians to help mitigate the access issues this community experiences when seeking healthcare.	Franklin and surrounding counties	Sacred Heart’s rural community
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### Adoption of Implementation Strategy

On August 18, 2025, the St. Mary’s Health Care System Board of Directors met to discuss the 2025-2028 Implementation Strategy for addressing the community health and social needs identified in the 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment. Upon review, the Board approved this Implementation Strategy and the related budget.



12/11/2025

Stonish Pierce, FACHE

October 14, 2025

