



2024 Year in Review

Tallahassee, Fla.— As 2024 comes to a close, the Florida Department of Health (Department), under the leadership of Governor DeSantis, has implemented historic, innovative strategies and continued support of successful initiatives that strengthen the overall health and well-being of Floridians. Leading the Nation in protecting parental liberties, strengthening medical freedoms, and increasing transparency with guidance on mRNA COVID-19 vaccines and community water fluoridation, Florida continues to serve as the pinnacle of holistic public health.

“In 2024, the Florida Department of Health promoted and protected the health of Floridians,” **said State Surgeon General Dr. Joseph A. Ladapo.** “Investments into Florida’s public health by Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Legislature have supported the strengthening of Florida’s health care workforce and infrastructure, improved critical public health programs and services, and championed a science-based, common-sense approach to health for all Floridians.”

Innovative Approaches to Cancer Treatment and Prevention

Cancer Connect Collaborative

The [Cancer Connect Collaborative](#), created as a council within the Department, advises the Department and the Florida Legislature on developing a holistic strategy to fund cancer research, facilities, and patient treatments. In 2024, the council developed a comprehensive long-range plan for the Casey DeSantis Cancer Research Program, incorporating input from cancer centers, research institutions, hospitals, and medical providers. By breaking down long-standing silos between researchers, cancer facilities, and medical providers, the Collaborative is working to transform Florida’s approach to cancer treatment and research. The plan, now ready for implementation, focuses on expanding grant opportunities, evaluating patient outcomes, and compiling best practices in cancer research and treatment. The Collaborative has also been tasked with reviewing Florida Cancer Innovation Fund grants that prioritize innovative research and treatment models while the Department oversees final grant allocations.

Florida Cancer Innovation Research Fund

In 2023, the Florida Cancer Innovation Research Fund allocated \$20 million to 30 awardees representing 16 institutions across the state for research covering a broad range of cancers (e.g., breast, colorectal, liver, brain, and pediatric cancers). Along with Florida’s annual investment of \$127.5 million through the Casey DeSantis Research Program, the 2024 Florida Legislature allocated a historic \$60 million to the Florida Cancer Innovation Fund, a \$40

million increase from 2023, to support groundbreaking research on new treatments, methodologies, and prevention strategies. This program fosters collaboration between universities, research institutions, and health care facilities, driving innovation and improving cancer care accessibility for all Floridians, regardless of their location.

Supporting Research through Additional Grant Programs

In addition to the Florida Cancer Innovation Fund, the Department awarded over \$18.4 million in grants for biomedical cancer research through the Bankhead-Coley Cancer Research Program, James and Esther King Biomedical Research Program, and Live Like Bella Pediatric Cancer Research Program.

Investing in Provider Workforce and Strengthening Resources

Florida Reimbursement Assistance for Medical Education

Due to the support of Governor DeSantis and the funding from the 2023 Legislative Session, the [Florida Reimbursement Assistance for Medical Education \(FRAME\)](#) program successfully completed its second award cycle in Fiscal Year 2023-2024, providing \$16 million in student debt relief to more than 1,100 health care professionals. Additionally, the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 program cycle featured the expansion of eligibility to include dentists, awarding an additional \$1.8 million to 38 eligible dentists. During the 2024 Legislative Session, FRAME was expanded to include dental hygienists and certain licensed mental health professionals for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2024-2025 program cycle. FRAME aims to advance health care access in the most underserved areas of the state by offering annual rewards to offset educational debts incurred by medical doctors, dentists, dental hygienists, osteopathic doctors, registered nurses, autonomous advanced practice registered nurses, physician assistants, and certain licensed mental health professionals.

Health Care Innovation Revolving Loan Program

During the 2024 Legislative Session, the Florida Legislature created the [Health Care Innovation Council and Revolving Loan Program](#) to address important health care challenges, including workforce shortages, rising costs, and unequal access. With a historic \$500 million investment over 10 years, the program will provide \$50 million annually for low-interest loans to transform health care delivery by harnessing cutting-edge health care innovation and facilitating collaboration between innovators, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders. The program will foster innovation by empowering organizations to adopt technologies, develop workforce pathways, and implement service delivery models that enhance efficiency, reduce emergency visits, and improve patient outcomes statewide.

Unlicensed Activity

In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the Division of Medical Quality Assurance effectively managed a record 1,489 unlicensed activity complaints, marking a 14.1% increase from Fiscal Year 2022-2023 and the highest number in five years, demonstrating its ability to adapt to a growing volume of complaints and uphold its commitment to protecting the public.

Streamlining Licensing

The Department continued to deliver timely service to health care applicants and practitioners to support the health care workforce. The volume of applications has steadily risen, with an average increase in applications of 7.3% annually over the past five fiscal years. In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the Department licensed over 123,000 new health care providers with an average processing time of one day per qualified applicant.

Empowering Volunteers

During Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the Department's [Volunteer Health Care Provider Program](#) reported over 450,000 medical and dental services provided by over 10,200 licensed health care providers and nearly 2,000 eligibility and referral specialists in 215 locations across 49 Florida counties, with an estimated value of more than \$351 million.

Rapid Disaster Response

During the 2024 Hurricane Season, the Department, as part of the State Emergency Response Team, supported rapid response efforts before, during, and after each storm. The Department completed or supported over 600 missions for patient movement, staffing at special needs shelters, county health department staff augmentation, oxygen and other special needs shelter equipment and supplies, and more.

Additionally, mobile medical units were set up in communities to ease the burden on surrounding hospitals, and the Department's 10-bed mobile field hospital was deployed and set up at a hospital that sustained damage to ensure continuity of health care in the area. Environmental health strike teams were also deployed to impacted counties, conducting post-storm environmental health emergency assessments of food distribution sites, critical facilities (e.g., mobile home/RV parks, adult living centers), private well water sampling, onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems (e.g., septic systems), and conducted public outreach and education.

Over 1,200 emergency medical services resources were deployed statewide, successfully facilitating one of the state's largest evacuations missions of health care facilities, conducting wellness checks, providing community-based medical care, supporting Urban Search and Rescue Medical operations, and augmenting local 911 systems.

Safeguarding the Health of our Children and Youth

Florida Prenatal Screening

The Florida Prenatal Screen is a voluntary screening tool available to all mothers that identifies pregnant women who may benefit from home visiting services to improve pregnancy and birth outcomes. In 2024, the Florida Prenatal Screen was modernized, allowing health care providers to offer the screening electronically at a pregnant woman's first prenatal appointment. Previously completed through a paper-driven process, the electronic version will enable providers to send the screening via email or text for completion before the first appointment at the patient's convenience. This innovation reduces manual data entry, improves data accuracy, and provides real-time data. Most notably, the electronic screening has shortened the time for pregnant women to be connected to services, reducing the average from 33 days to just 5 days.

Telehealth Maternity Care Program

In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the [Telehealth Maternity Care Program](#) served over 6,400 women across 16 counties, improving care accessibility and maternal health outcomes. Nearly 60% of participants enrolled before delivery, benefiting from targeted interventions that reduced emergency room visits, optimized blood sugar levels, and effectively managed gestational diabetes through remote monitoring devices. These efforts resulted in earlier access to care, lower cesarean section rates, and fewer hospitalizations. Consistently high satisfaction was reported by program participants, clinicians, and community partners, highlighting the program's success in delivering safer and more effective care in these communities.

Newborn Screening and Early Care

In 2024, the Department's Newborn Screening Program successfully implemented Mucopolysaccharidosis Type II (MPS II) screening for all newborns in Florida. Since its launch, over 78,000 newborns have been screened, marking a significant achievement in early detection and intervention. This initiative is a critical step in improving the health outcomes of affected infants, ensuring timely diagnosis and treatment to prevent long-term complications associated with MPS II.

Supporting Childhood Development

The [Early Steps](#) program provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers, ages birth to 36 months, who have or are at-risk for developmental disabilities or delays. In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the Department's statewide locations served over 62,000 children, a 4.2% increase from the previous year. In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, 98.8% of the children who completed the program demonstrated improved social interaction and well-being skills and improved ability to understand and use language; 99% demonstrated improved knowledge and cognitive ability.

Enhancing Medical Foster Care

The Medical Foster Care Program enhanced outreach efforts to support a growing need for foster families for medically complex children. Since launching a recruitment portal where interested parents can complete a readiness profile to determine compatibility with the program, the program has received interest from over 150 parents to begin their journey to become medical foster parents. Since January 2024, 48 new parents have received program training, and seven new families are currently providing nurturing homes to medically complex children.

Child Care Food Program

In 2024, the Child Care Food Program reimbursed child care providers for serving over 146,000,000 meals to children in participating child care centers, family day care homes, afterschool sites, and homeless shelters. Approximately 295,000 Florida children received meals each day through the program.

Florida Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program

The Florida [WIC](#) Program launched Willow, an AI virtual assistant available 24/7 across platforms like the Department website, Florida WIC mobile app, phone calls, and more. Currently available in English, Willow is being trained to support Spanish and Haitian Creole users. Willow handles tasks such as answering FAQs, scheduling appointments, checking clients in, facilitating document uploads, and updating clinic systems in real-time.

Willow has interacted with over 250,000 customers, with 71% of these customers having their tasks addressed by Willow and only 29% needing follow-up by human interaction. Willow will continue to help enhance program participation, client engagement, and operational efficiency.

Legislative Accomplishments

In June, the Department's agency bill [CS/CS/SB 1582](#) was signed into law, which also established the Andrew John Anderson Pediatric Rare Disease Grant Program to advance the progress of research and cures for pediatric rare diseases by awarding grants through a competitive, peer-reviewed process.

Additionally, the Department's 2024-2025 Legislative Budget included:

- \$232 million for cancer research, including a historic \$60 million for the [Florida Cancer Innovation Fund](#) that supports groundbreaking cancer research stemming from emerging ideas, trends, and promising practices that can serve as a catalyst for further exploration and \$127.5 million for the [Casey DeSantis Cancer Research Program](#).
- \$10 million for the [and Mrs. Alfonse and Kathleen Cinotti Health Care Screening and Services Grant Program](#) to expand access to no-cost health care screenings and services facilitated by nonprofit entities.
- Over \$23.3 million to expand the [Telehealth Maternity Care Program](#) to serve women statewide to improve maternal health outcomes in underserved communities.
- \$500,000 for the newly established Andrew John Anderson Pediatric Rare Disease Grant Program to support innovative research projects that improve the health and well-being of all children with a rare disease.

About the Florida Department of Health

The Florida Department of Health, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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