

Thursday, December 29, 2022

YEAR IN REVIEW: DOH PROTECTING AND PROMOTING THE HEALTH OF ALL FLORIDIANS



Contact:

Communications Office
NewsMedia@flhealth.gov,
850-245-4111

Tallahassee, Fla.— Today, the Florida Department of Health (Department) is highlighting its efforts to further Governor DeSantis' comprehensive approach to public health and improve the health and well-being of all Floridians. The Department continues to renew efforts to promote successful health outcomes by focusing on the overall health of Floridians, both mentally and physically.

"There is a lot of great work being done to advance public health in Florida," **said State Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo**. "This year's accomplishments demonstrate the dedicated and tireless efforts of the Florida Department of Health's staff and partners throughout the state."

Ending Substance Use Disorder and Overdose

In July, Surgeon General Dr. Joseph Ladapo joined First Lady Casey DeSantis at a round table to [announce a statewide advisory](#) on the dangers of fentanyl, now the leading cause of death in the United States for individuals age 18 to 45. This event is one of the ways that the Department coordinated with other state agencies to share available state resources on substance abuse and mental wellbeing to help meet the needs of communities across the state.

In August, Florida unveiled its historic steps to fight overdoses from Substance Use Disorder and disrupt the opioid epidemic.

The Florida Department of Health, Department of Children and Families (DCF), and Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) have partnered to implement a network of addiction care, [Coordinated Opioid Recovery Network \(CORE\)](#), the first of its kind in the United States. This places Florida as a leader in sustainable addiction and opioid recovery. CORE has been initiated in 12 counties (Brevard, Clay, Escambia, Gulf, Marion, Pasco, Volusia, Citrus, Duval, Flagler, Manatee, and Pinellas) this year and will continue to bring additional counties into CORE in phases.

This comprehensive approach from care and peer navigators directly within an emergency department, to sustainable overall health care, expands every aspect of overdose response and treats all primary and secondary impacts of substance use disorder.

The network does not solely depend on emergency response for overdoses and Substance Use Disorder. It ensures patients are stabilized and treated for coexisting medical and mental health conditions through dental care, primary care, psychiatric evaluation, maternal care, and social support services. Social support services can address career training, housing, or food insecurity.

Additionally, the Department has continued its efforts with DCF to ensure that our first responders have access to naloxone, also known as Narcan, through the [Helping Emergency Responders Obtain Support \(HEROS\) program](#). The Department has also provided naloxone at county health departments throughout the state.

Spearheaded by First Lady Casey DeSantis, the Department has led the State's [The Facts. Your Future.](#) campaign in coordination with several state agencies including the Department of Education and Department of Juvenile Justice. The campaign saw the development of more resources for students to have in their toolkits and assisting with the operations of assemblies at schools across the state. *The Facts. Your Future.* directly engages youth in Florida to improve their understanding of the life-altering effects of drug use and equips students with tools they need to make the right decisions to say no to drugs and alcohol.

COVID-19

The Department began 2022 by joining Governor DeSantis in his efforts to [ensure Floridians were able to access treatment for COVID-19](#). When the Biden Administration chose to pause the distribution of lifesaving monoclonal antibodies, the State of Florida sprang into action to ensure our first in the nation, statewide monoclonal distribution sites were equipped to distribute this treatment to those who need it. Florida understands that early treatment saves lives.

In February, the Surgeon General joined Governor DeSantis to announce [significant changes to Florida's COVID-19 guidance](#) including pushing back on unscientific corporate masking, reducing isolation for all Floridians including those in schools and daycares, and recommending that physicians should exercise their individual clinical judgment and expertise based on their patients' needs and preferences. This guidance ensured that Floridians could live freely, and that the State was following science, not Dr. Fauci. Public health updates in Florida included:

- Pushing Back Against Corporate Masking for Employees
- Advising Health Care Practitioners and Facilities to Reevaluate Status Quo Protocols in Favor of Scientifically Based Treatment Options to Benefit Patients
- Updating Daycare Guidance to Limit Child Isolation to 5 Days
- Updating the School Rule to Limit Student Isolation to 5 Days
- Reducing Isolation for Floridians with COVID-19 to 5 Days

Along with Governor DeSantis, the Florida Department of Health has worked tirelessly to protect those at highest risk from COVID-19, while realistically assessing vaccine safety and precautionary measures by establishing the new [Public Health Integrity Committee](#).

The committee will be overseen by the State Surgeon General to assess federal public health recommendations and guidance to ensure that Florida's public health policies are tailored for Florida's communities and priorities.

The State also filed a petition for a Statewide Grand Jury to investigate crimes and wrongdoing committed against Floridians related to the COVID-19 vaccine, which has been granted.

Additionally, the Department is leading further surveillance into sudden deaths of individuals that received the COVID-19 vaccine in Florida based on autopsy results.

The Department enforced Florida law that protects Floridians from losing their jobs due to COVID-19 vaccine mandates and protects parents' rights to make health care decisions for students. In June, the Department helped Governor DeSantis [to turnover Special Olympics International's unlawful vaccine mandate](#) for the 2022 USA Games in Orlando, Florida.

Protecting Mothers and Babies

In Florida, we know that we are better when everybody counts. In April, Governor DeSantis signed the Reducing Fetal and Infant Mortality Act, to protect the lives of Florida's most vulnerable by prohibiting

abortions after 15 weeks of gestation. The most significant protections for life in Florida history. The Department has also specifically worked to ensure the health and safety of mothers and babies following birth.

The Department and AHCA share a common goal to improve maternal and child health outcomes and understand the importance of eliminating unnecessary Cesarean Sections (C-sections). Although C-sections can be lifesaving in limited circumstances, many women who aren't at high risk for delivery complications get unnecessary C-sections. This increases maternal morbidity (such as higher rates of hemorrhage, transfusions, infections, and blood clots), mortality, and health care costs.

C-sections also bring risks for babies such as higher rates of infection, respiratory complications, neonatal intensive care unit stays, as well as lower breastfeeding rates.

The Healthy People 2030 goal is to reduce C-section births among low-risk women with no prior births with a target of 23.6% or below.

In 2020, 26 birthing hospitals in Florida met, or were below, the Healthy People 2030 target goal of 23.6%. These hospitals were recognized in 2022 through award presentations.

Rapid Disaster Response

Prior to, during, and after the impacts of Hurricanes Ian and Nicole, the Department partnered with the Florida Health and Human Services team to successfully prepare and respond to those in need.

The Department helped evacuate over 9,000 individuals from more than 200 health care facilities. The Department also coordinated the staging and deployment of roughly 500 emergency management service vehicles which provided both land and air support.

By signing several emergency orders, the State Surgeon General expanded state licensing regulations, allowing for various health care practitioners to volunteer their expertise and care as we continue to recover.

Additionally, the Department partnered with Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez and the Florida Department of Management Services to collect donations for mothers and babies in these impacted areas. The Department successfully distributed nearly 1,000 backpacks containing supplies such as diapers, baby wipes, medications, and hygiene products to mothers as they recovered from these devastating effects.

Supporting a Strong Health Care Workforce

The Department's Division of Medical Quality Assurance (MQA) advanced its business in novel ways throughout the year, including through its use of data and technology to license health care practitioners and facilities, enforce statutory regulations, and provide accurate and timely information. MQA has continued to deliver timely service to its customers as the volume of applications has steadily risen.

Over the past five years, MQA has decreased the average processing time for a new license application by 49%, while the number of initial licenses issued increased by 45%. Fiscal Year 2021-22 alone experienced an increase of 11% in the number of initial licenses issued.

The Board of Nursing led the charge to speed up the initial licensure process by hosting their first-ever odd-month conference call virtually between regularly scheduled in-person board meetings. As a result, the review and approval of 50 credential files were expedited, allowing 50 nurses to enter the Florida workforce one month sooner than previously anticipated.

MQA participated in a workgroup with nursing home administrators, Florida Health Care Association, and Prometric, the national CNA examination administration provider, to develop efficient solutions that

comply with licensure process requirements and improve access to examination sites. The workgroup developed a solution to establish remote testing sites in rural communities, where multiple facilities may access testing services, reducing the need to travel and incur additional expenses associated with seeking full certification.

Legislative Accomplishments

The Florida Department of Health's agency bill passed on March 10, 2022, as CS/CS/SB 768.

- The bill updates the Targeted Outreach for Pregnant Woman Act (TOPWA) to account for current medication options, information on HIV, and mental health issues that may lead to a pregnancy being high risk.
- The bill requires the Department to adopt potency variation rules and medical marijuana treatment centers to recall all marijuana that fails to meet the safety and potency requirements.
- The bill authorizes the Department to test samples of all forms of marijuana and immunizes Department staff from prosecution for possessing marijuana for this purpose.
- Amends and updates licensure laws for various professions regulated by the Department.

The Department's 2021-2022 legislative budget:

- Provides \$1.9 million for the Ounce of Prevention program to evaluate innovative prevention programs for at-risk children and families, with an additional \$250,000 for statewide public education campaigns to educate the public on critical prevention issues facing Florida's at-risk children and families.
 - Provides \$1.5 million for Sertoma Speech and Hearing Foundation of Florida, Inc., a Florida non-profit corporation, supporting auditory oral early intervention programs serving children who are deaf, ages birth through two, in multiple counties including Florida's rural and underserved areas.
-

Healthier You

The Surgeon General continued the Department's mission to educate Floridians on ways to improve habits and overall health. Healthier You is a resource for Floridians of all ages to get active, go outside, improve nutrition, and encourage vitamin D intake.

In December, the Surgeon General challenged other [state agency leaders](#) to show off their Healthier You routines on social media to encourage their staff and the individuals they serve to practice healthy habits.

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.

Follow us on Twitter at [@HealthyFla](#) and on [Facebook](#). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.