Dear Friends,

Caring for our patients at Akron Children’s Hospital in 2021 required our entire organization to go above and beyond. While the COVID-19 pandemic kept us busy, our team moved forward on key projects and initiatives to ensure the health of our region’s infants, children, teens and young adults. As you look over this year’s report to the community, we hope you will see how Akron Children’s is fully invested in being the area’s biggest champion for keeping children and their families safe, healthy and happy.

Read on to learn more about:

- Our role in the Zero Suicide Pediatric Initiative, which aims to improve screening and education to prevent youth suicides
- How we’re working to help more babies celebrate their first birthday through our Safe Sleep Academy and other safe sleep outreach
- Akron Children’s expansion into Lorain County and the introduction of our accountable care organization, Akron Children’s Health Collaborative, to improve health care for families whose children are served by Medicaid

With the support and assistance of many volunteers, donors and community partners, we are addressing unmet health needs and improving lives every single day.

Christopher A. Gessner  
President and CEO  
Akron Children’s Hospital

Virginia C. Addicott  
Chair  
Akron Children’s Hospital Board of Directors
"To ensure we focus our efforts where they will have the greatest impact, especially for those who are most vulnerable, we continued our work on the 2020 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) priorities. Through collaborative strategies and programs, we are improving the health and well-being of children in our region by addressing mental/behavioral health and adverse childhood experiences, infant mortality, and asthma and respiratory care. These priorities have allowed us to forge new partnerships, align our resources, expand our programs and implement innovative strategies – all with the goal of improving child health."

BERNETT L. WILLIAMS
CHIEF DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION OFFICER AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR COMMUNITY INITIATIVES
Our child health priorities in 2021 were defined by two major initiatives – the creation of a new accountable care organization and the expansion of school-based services to transform how we deliver patient care.

Delivering on our mission to improve child health

As a leader in pediatric care and child health, we recognize that inequities still exist for our most vulnerable patients and a different model of care is necessary to improve the health of children.

Through Akron Children’s Health Collaborative, our new accountable care organization, we’re responsible for care coordination and the cost of care for 100,000 children in 13 counties in our region. By partnering with nonprofit health plan CareSource, we are breaking down barriers to access and improving child health through family-centered care coordination, an engaged network of providers and a unified focus on quality, access and health equity for families who rely on Medicaid.

COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT PRIORITY: ASTHMA & RESPIRATORY CARE

Meeting the needs of children where they are

Children spend the majority of their time in school, so our School Health Services play an important role in keeping more kids healthy and in the classroom.

Through the expansion of School-Based Health Centers, we provide a convenient way for children to receive health care, particularly those who might not otherwise have access. This also helps to ensure that students with chronic diseases like asthma or type 1 diabetes have continuity in their treatment plans.

This model of care removes many of the barriers that prevent children from getting the care they need, such as lack of transportation or parents’ inability to take time away from work. Keeping children in school whenever possible is also essential to their academic success.
Protecting our patients, staff and community

Providing a path forward

When the COVID-19 vaccine was approved for children ages 12-15 years old, we moved quickly to set up school-based vaccine clinics and offer vaccinations at our sites. And we did so again when the vaccine was approved for children 5 to 11 years of age.

Our caregivers also provided fact-based information on COVID-19 and the vaccines to parents and the public. This included advocating against passage of Ohio House Bill 248, which aimed to weaken the ability of hospitals to require vaccinations for their employees.

Through partnerships with community social service agencies, we collaborated to provide COVID-19 vaccines to adults, helping to protect very young children including those who are most vulnerable and unable to protect themselves.

“‘We have a responsibility as a children’s hospital to improve the health and wellness of the children and the communities we serve.’”

– DR. MICHAEL BIGHAM, CHIEF QUALITY OFFICER

Supporting a safe return

At Akron Children’s, we want to help keep all children healthy and safe, whether they’re our patients or not. As demand for COVID-19 testing increased when schools reopened, we increased our testing capabilities and rolled out drive-thru testing sites for children up to age 18, without any exceptions.

A generous $1 million gift from our longtime charitable partner Signet Jewelers furthered efforts for a safe return to school by supporting our work to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to Akron-area school personnel.

85,592
Total Vaccines Administered

including

29,667
Vaccines Administered in Schools

251
School Clinics
Leading the way toward zero youth suicides

The loss of just one young person to suicide is devastating to families, friends and school communities. That’s why we are one of six Ohio children’s hospitals participating in the Ohio Zero Suicide Pediatric Initiative, which is providing a coordinated and collaborative response to the rising suicide rate among Ohio youth.

Akron Children’s convened the Summit County Youth Suicide Prevention Subcommittee (YSPS) to address the alarming trend on a local level. Working with nationally-known experts in mental health and suicide prevention, we provide training to community agencies serving youth. This is also a strategy under our Mental/Behavioral Health priority, identified through our Community Health Needs Assessment.

For youth who are LGBTQ+, the risk for depression and suicide is even higher. To fulfill our commitment to serve this vulnerable population, we’re collaborating with The Trevor Project and Kent State University’s Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to become more LGBTQ+ inclusive and foster more allies within our hospital and the community.

This work has also been expanded with the Mahoning County Suicide Prevention Coalition, which recognizes the disproportionate risk of suicide among those who identify as LGBTQ+.

“By placing a special focus on this at-risk population, we can make significant progress toward our ultimate goal of zero youth suicides.”

– DOUG STRAIGHT, CLINICAL OPERATIONS DIRECTOR - DIVISION OF PEDIATRIC PSYCHIATRY AND PSYCHOLOGY
“Being an ally to an LGBTQ+ youth can make a significant impact on their mental health and well-being. Receiving care in an affirming environment where they feel accepted and supported provides a level of protection against at-risk behaviors that cannot be underestimated. This is especially important if they do not have a supportive home environment.”

– SHERRY BLAIR, SUMMIT COUNTY YSPS CO-CHAIR

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**Home of the B.R.A.V.E.**

Providing a calm, compassionate response for those experiencing a mental health crisis is vital to de-escalating the situation and fostering a safe and trusting environment. Our Public Safety department has created a specialized mental health team called Behavioral Response Against Violence Escalation (B.R.A.V.E.) to respond to these situations.

B.R.A.V.E officers have received crisis intervention training (CIT) and dress in khakis and polo shirts to look more approachable.

This program was the vision of Jerome Klue, MPA, director of Akron Children’s Public Safety department and chief of police, who, along with Lieutenant William (Keith) Heilmeier, has collaborated with other community law enforcement agencies to expand CIT offerings.

For these efforts and the support of crisis intervention training for law enforcement in our community, Chief Klue was recognized in 2021 with the CIT Law Enforcement Leader of the Year Award, presented by the Ohio Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence and National Alliance on Mental Illness Ohio.
Through our efforts to reduce infant mortality, we are helping to ensure that more babies reach their first birthday. This includes educating families, caregivers and health providers about the importance of creating a safe sleep environment for babies.

“Safe sleep may be as easy as ABC. Babies should always sleep Alone, on their Backs, in an empty Crib – but sleep-related deaths still occur,” said Dr. Jennifer Manning, a neonatologist at Akron Children’s Hospital Mahoning Valley.

Dr. Manning is championing education to health care professionals, so they can help educate families about the importance of safe sleep and address barriers that may prevent families from creating the safest sleep environment for their babies. This includes a Grand Rounds she co-presented with Dr. Susan Nofziger, pediatric hospitalist, and Cesley Hegyi, MPH, injury prevention specialist.

“Most parents think that it won’t happen to their baby, but unexpected infant death occurs far more often than many people realize. Most important, infant deaths due to unsafe sleep are completely preventable,” said Dr. Manning.
Beyond the ABCs of safe sleep

We’ve created the online Safe Sleep Academy to provide interactive training modules for physicians and health care professionals, community health workers and home visitors, and families and caregivers. The courses promote best practices for keeping babies safe when sleeping, and provide advice and resources for physicians and health care professionals when talking to patient families.

In developing the Safe Sleep Academy, we partnered with the Molly Ann Gries Foundation, which was founded by Meagen and Jeff Gries following their infant daughter’s death, to help spread the word about safe sleep practices.

“The course for physicians and health care professionals also addresses factors that may influence unsafe sleep practices and how we can help our patient families overcome them,” said Cesley Hegyi, MPH, injury prevention specialist. “We want to see more babies thrive and help families avoid the heartbreak of losing a child.”

Visit the Safe Sleep Academy at safesleepforbabies.org.

Filling a critical need for laboratory technicians

Akron Children’s joins Summa Health and Aultman Health Foundation in the Akron Cooperative Medical Laboratory Science Program. We pool resources to support this cooperative program, academically, financially and administratively. Students accepted for the year-long clinical internship are trained to perform highly complex laboratory tests, as they prepare for a high-demand career as a laboratory technician.

Graduates go on to work in local laboratories including our own. These new scientists are eligible to take a national certifying exam from the American Society of Clinical Pathology, further ensuring our laboratories provide highly accurate testing for patients in our community.
When Erika Proctor gave birth to her first child, Lyric Ayers, she had no idea that she carried the sickle cell trait or what having sickle cell disease would mean for her precious baby girl.

“I was devastated,” said Erika.

She was referred to the Showers Family Center for Childhood Cancer and Blood Disorders at Akron Children’s, where she saw children who were undergoing cancer treatment, prompting even more worry about Lyric’s diagnosis. That fear soon changed to hope as Erika met Lyric’s care team.

“They’ve helped us through some really tough times, throughout all the ups and downs of sickle cell disease,” she said.

Akron Children’s is one of six designated sickle cell programs in Ohio. Lyric is under the care of pediatric hematologist-oncologist Dr. Stephanie Savelli, but many other members of her care team have also played an important role in helping her live with the disease. This includes nurse Lisa Sidebotham and social worker Joe Delagrange.

“Lisa is the best nurse on the planet, so loving and caring. She’s been my rock. Joe is my go-to for everything. He’s been there to lend an ear and the support he has given me is priceless,” Erika said.

Lyric is now 15 years old and a sophomore at Our Lady of the Elms High School, where she plays volleyball and tennis and is on the track team. As she looks toward the future, she hopes to work in the medical field someday, which was inspired by her own health journey. For Erika, one of the challenges is keeping her daughter from doing too much and not slowing down when she’s in pain, a common problem in sickle cell disease. Although Lyric says her pain tolerance is high, sometimes the pain in her arms and legs becomes too much and she must be admitted to receive intravenous pain medication.

“I hate the time away and the side effects of pain medication, but I try to keep a positive mind-set,” Lyric said. “I don’t let having sickle cell disease defeat me or bring me down.”
Our new Amherst Health Center opened in December, allowing us to provide Lorain County families with high quality pediatric care closer to home. The one-story, 23,000-square-foot facility offers primary care, rehabilitative services, specialty services, radiology and lab services in a child-friendly environment.

We also expanded our collaboration with Mercy Health – Lorain to operate their special care nursery. We provide the expert newborn care, while Mercy Health – Lorain delivers high-quality maternal care.

Our regional expansion continued to the northwest with the opening of an outpatient health center to provide our primary care and specialty services to families in Sandusky and surrounding communities. To the south, we opened a new primary care practice in Millersburg. With the additions of Akron Children’s Hospital Pediatrics offices in Millersburg and Sandusky, our primary care network has grown to 35 locations.
Our investment in the children we serve would not be possible without the tremendous support of our donors. We are grateful for this generous support, which helps us fulfill our mission of building a stronger, healthier future for all children.

All data in this report is from 2021.

Honors and Awards

NURSING EXCELLENCE:
- Magnet® Hospital Recognition by the American Nurse Credentialing Center
- NDNQI® Award for Outstanding Nursing Quality

BEST WORKPLACE:
- Forbes’ America's Best Large Employers
- NorthCoast 99 and Plain Dealer Top Workplace Awards
- LinkedIn 25 Top Companies in Greater Cleveland-Akron-Canton area
- Becker's Hospital Review 150 Top Places to Work in Healthcare

PATIENT CARE:
- Newsweek’s Best Specialized Hospitals – Pediatrics
- U.S. News Best Children's Hospitals for Gastroenterology, Neurology & Neurosurgery, Pulmonology & Lung Surgery, Urology
Community benefit financials

| Unreimbursed Medicaid & Uncompensated Care | $158.7M |
| Research, Advocacy & Community Partnerships | $9.6M |
| Health Professional Education | $10.1M |
| Community Programs & Services | $63.1M |

TOTAL COMMUNITY INVESTMENT $241.5M*

M = millions

*unaudited – Finances in the report are pending IRS review.

To be included in community benefit reporting, activities must incur a cost to the hospital and address an identified community need and at least one of four objectives:

- Improve health care access
- Enhance community health
- Advance medical or health knowledge
- Reduce the burden on government and community-based agencies

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Thank you to our Community Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee!

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