



Akron Children's

2026-2028 CHNA

Implementation Strategy



Akron Children's

Introduction

Akron Children's is a nonprofit, independent pediatric health care system that has been dedicated to caring for children since 1890. It is the only health system in Northeast Ohio focused solely on pediatric care. The organization includes two hospital campuses, eight regional health centers, and more than 50 primary and specialty care locations across the state. Through its extensive Akron Children's Pediatrics network, families can easily access high-quality primary care from infancy through young adulthood.

In 2024, Akron Children's provided over 1.5 million patient visits and employed 7,338 staff members. The Akron hospital campus features 281 beds for general, specialty, neonatal, and pediatric intensive care, while the Boardman campus includes 42 beds for general and special care nursery patients. The system also collaborates with adult health care providers in Summit, Stark, Mahoning, Trumbull, and Wayne counties to manage neonatal intensive care units and special care nurseries, for a total of 406 registered and leased beds.

Between October 2024 and September 2025, Akron Children's conducted a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to better understand the most pressing health challenges facing children and families within its service area. While Akron Children's offers some services beyond pediatric care, this assessment concentrated on the pediatric and adolescent population (birth through age 18) who represent the majority of its patients. The Center for Community Solutions, an independent, nonpartisan research organization specializing in Ohio's health and human services landscape, facilitated the CHNA process.

The resulting Implementation Strategy focuses on improving community health across an eleven-county service region: Ashland, Columbiana, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Richland, Stark, Summit, Tuscarawas, Trumbull, and Wayne. This region encompasses children from birth through age 18 and represents over 17% of Ohio's youth. In total, the area includes more than 2.1 million residents, of whom 459,222 are under the age of 18.

About the Implementation Strategy

CHNA Approach

The findings of the CHNA informed this Implementation Strategy. The CHNA was built on a mixed-methods approach. Primary data was provided through an extensive community survey, focus groups with parents throughout the region, and stakeholder forums with community leaders and service providers throughout the region. Secondary data from various sources put together a picture of the communities served by Akron Children's.

Development of the Implementation Strategy

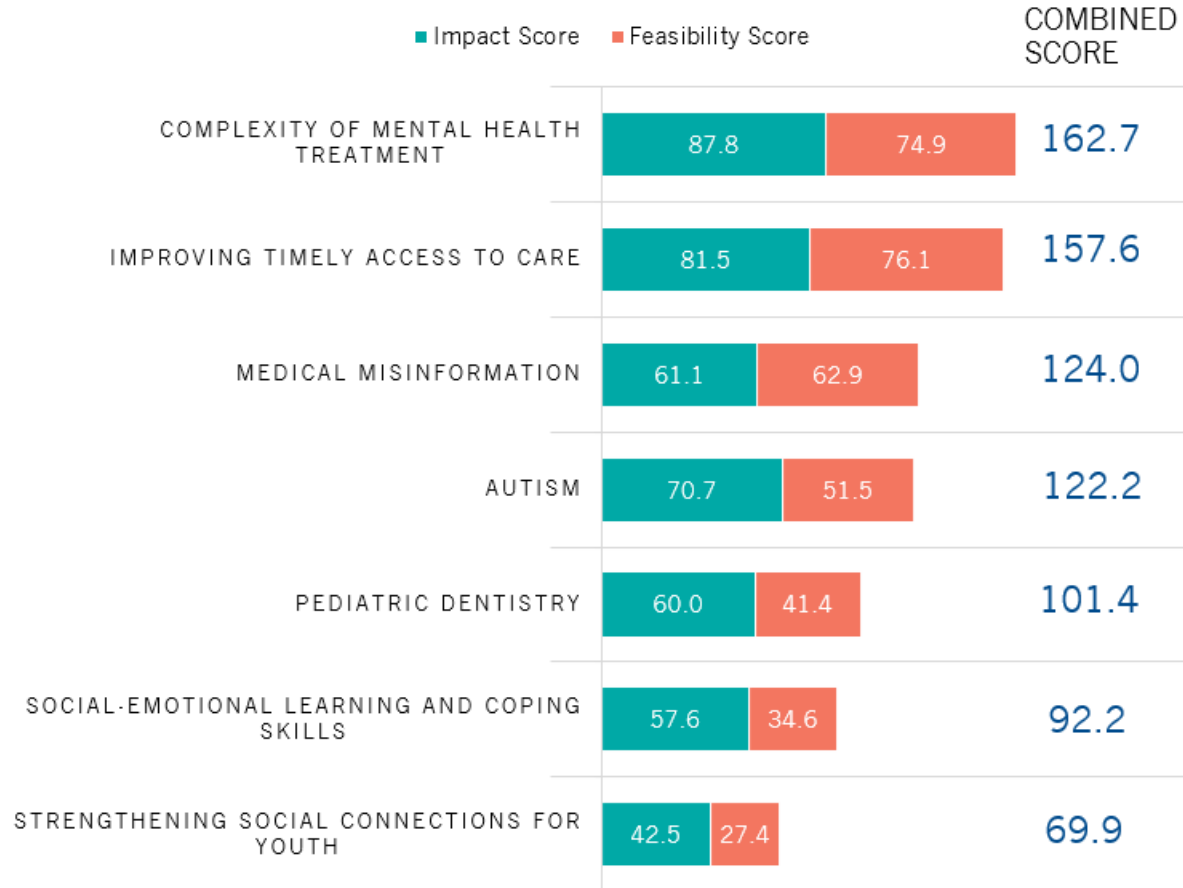
After analyzing information from primary and secondary data sources, multiple themes emerged from the data. This data was used to develop a prioritization packet for an ad hoc committee tasked with guiding the prioritization process. On June 11, 2025, more than 20 Akron Children's leaders convened to participate in a prioritization session focused on the most frequently identified health needs affecting children in the region.

During the session, this ad hoc committee received an overview of key health issues drawn from the community assessment findings. Through an initial review and discussion, the group narrowed the list of identified health concerns from 13 to seven.

The ad hoc committee members then examined detailed data related to these seven priority areas. Facilitated discussions allowed participants to share perspectives on each topic and explore opportunities for alignment.

To conclude the process, each member independently and anonymously rated both the impact and feasibility of Akron Children's addressing each health concern, using a 0–100 scale. The results were combined into an overall impact–feasibility score, which was plotted on a matrix in real time to highlight top priorities and guide further discussion.

PRIORITIZATION CHART



Priority Health Needs Identified

Ultimately, the chosen priorities fell under three overarching issues: Mental and Behavioral Health, Access to Care, and Health Information. These three areas were identified as factors that significantly affect the health and well-being of children in the Akron Children's region.

Additionally, five other significant health needs were identified through the prioritization process. These needs were not chosen as specific priorities either due to ranking lower in the prioritization process, steps already being taken by Akron Children's, or being beyond the scope of the resources of Akron Children's. These other significant health needs are as follows: Care for Cost-Burdened Families, Food Security, Housing and Lead Exposure, Autism, and Pediatric Dentistry.

Implementation Strategy for Priority Issues

In developing the detailed plans to address each priority issue, Akron Children's CHNA team identified key staff working within each of the priority areas selected in the prioritization process. This included individuals who have been involved in the CHNA process in previous cycles as well as new contributors. Meetings were conducted to introduce these staff to the core objectives and goals surrounding CHNA implementation, and to brainstorm current and prospective efforts that could impact outcomes within each of the identified priority areas. Involved team members were encouraged to develop strategies that would spark long-term impact and lay a solid foundation to address the needs of the community beyond the timeframe of this CHNA.

While the strategies involve a variety of inputs both internal and external to Akron Children's, they do not represent the full scope of hospital and community-based initiatives relating to each priority health issue. As additional funding and resources are identified to be in alignment with these strategies, they may be incorporated.

Mental and Behavioral Health

Throughout the assessment process, it became evident that mental and behavioral health was of significant concern for youth, caregivers, and community stakeholders. Fueled by stress and anxiety, youth are facing challenges that directly impact their mental health and wellbeing. Mental and behavioral health concerns ranked highest in impact and second in feasibility when assessed by the ad hoc committee that convened for the prioritization process. Akron Children's has the resources, expertise, and community connection to address mental and behavioral health concerns and create a lasting impact for families in the region.

The Mental and Behavioral Health implementation strategy has three core areas of focus for the 2026-2028 cycle: system integration of behavioral health services, behavioral health workforce development, and youth suicide prevention. These core areas build upon the foundation from previous CHNA cycles and expand the impact Akron Children's can have in addressing youth mental wellbeing.

System Integration of Behavioral Health Services

Global Aim: Increase access to behavioral health services in communities where resources are limited and underserved youth populations exist.

Specific Aim(s):	Core Strategies:
<p>Expand access to behavioral health services by delivering care in underserved communities where gaps currently exist, ensuring that youth facing social determinant-related barriers can receive timely and appropriate support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train behavioral health providers to offer evidenced-based, early childhood intervention in primary and specialty care settings • Develop partnerships with school-based health teams to provide behavioral health services in the school setting • Develop a team of Care Coordinators to address barriers to connecting with behavioral health services
<p>Integrate behavioral health services in primary care and local adult emergency departments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition remaining Akron Children’s Pediatrics (ACP) offices to an integrated model of behavioral health care • Implement a model of collaborative care in primary care settings with limited access to child psychiatry professionals • Further expand Psychiatric Intake and Referral Center (PIRC) services to adult emergency departments in Ohio utilizing telehealth
<p>Key Resources & Partnerships</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local school systems and school-based care teams • Adult emergency departments in our service area • Community mental health agencies 	

Behavioral Health Workforce Development

Global Aim: Build capacity within the behavioral health workforce through education, training, and strategic recruitment strategies.

Specific Aim(s):	Core Strategies:
<p>Expand and fill internships and fellowships in behavioral health (Psychology, Psychiatry).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a pipeline for recruitment of pediatric psychologists through development of an American Psychological Association Accredited Internship • Expand partnerships with educational institutions to provide externship opportunities for those training to be a pediatric psychologist • Develop a research fellowship to provide targeted training to psychologists/psychiatrists with an interest in expanding research in emotional and behavioral concerns in youth
<p>Create a mental health therapy workforce that is trained to provide evidence based behavioral treatment for youth, ages early childhood through teen years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand partnerships with educational institutions to offer internship opportunities for mental health therapists • Recruit doctoral level regional program directors to partner with mental health therapists to support use of evidenced based treatment strategies • Utilize independently/dependently licensed mental health therapists to expand access to behavioral health services and to meet needs in the community.
<h3>Key Resources & Partnerships</h3>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local colleges and universities • Community mental health agencies • Akron Children’s Human Resources and Talent Development 	

Youth Suicide Prevention

Global Aim: Advance integrated approaches to youth suicide prevention.

Specific Aim(s):	Core Strategies:
<p>Increase awareness of the complexity of issues which impact youth suicide at the community level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with the Summit County Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADM) Board to increase awareness of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in integrated medical settings • Train Akron Children’s staff and community members on how to recognize warning signs of suicide and respond effectively • Educate the community about the importance of decreased access to lethal means for at-risk youth
<p>Strengthen the commitment of the Youth Suicide Prevention subcommittee members to lead initiatives which they identify as critical to address the changing demographics/needs of youth suicide in our community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain the voices of youth and families to inform youth suicide prevention activities • Collaborate with and support agencies who currently serve vulnerable youth in the community
<p>Key Resources & Partnerships</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summit County ADM Board • Youth and families that reside in our communities • Community-based agencies 	

PRIORITY AREA

Access to Care

During the assessment, caregivers expressed deep concerns about accessing care for their children. Long wait-times, proximity to specialty care services and a lack of flexible scheduling options impacts the availability of accessible services in the community. The ad hoc committee ranked access to care highest in feasibility and second in impact during the prioritization process. Akron Children's has the resources and opportunity to use advanced technology and alternate care platforms to reach families where they are and improve access to care across the region.

The Access to Care implementation strategy has four core areas of focus for the 2026-2028 cycle: appointments scheduled without a phone call, appointment scheduled by Akron Children's After-Hours, new patient access, and mobile access to care. Multidisciplinary teams at Akron Children's will partner to make care options more readily available in our communities.

Appointments Scheduled without a Phone Call

Global Aim: Increase appointments scheduled without a phone call to 54 percent of all appointments.

Specific Aim(s):	Core Strategies:
Reach patients and families through online scheduling tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create awareness for families around the option to schedule online using social media • Ensure online scheduling is efficient and user friendly • Work directly with department specialty leaders on workflow opportunities
Engage with more families through point of care (POC) scheduling from Patient Service Representatives upon checkout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish data/dashboard to track POC scheduling per location • Enhance POC training for Akron Children’s staff • Understand barriers that are limiting POC scheduling
Key Resources & Partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Akron Children’s Patient Service Representatives • Akron Children’s departmental leadership teams • Appointment Center Trainers 	

Appointments Scheduled by Children's After Hours

Global Aim: Increase the number of appointments the Children's After-Hours team schedules.

Specific Aim(s):	Core Strategies:
Expand Akron Children's After Hours to offer families more types of appointments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work directly with ACP to see what other appointments can be scheduled • Work with other specialists to understand if After-Hours can schedule for them • Understand barriers that could limit scheduling ease
Training for the After-Hours team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop more robust scheduling training • Monitor the effect of training by tracking appointments scheduled • Develop a process to QA accuracy of appointments scheduled
Key Resources & Partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACP offices • Appointment Center Trainers • Akron Children's specialty departments leadership teams 	

New Patient Access

Global Aim: Increase new patient access in primary care.

Specific Aim(s):

Create a model where new patients are seen within 14 days

Create a model where new sick patients are seen within 24 hours

Core Strategies:

- Work with ACP offices to develop an open template that increases availability of appointment types
- Create flexible scheduling opportunities for new families seeking appointments

Key Resources & Partnerships

- ACP offices
- Akron Children’s appointment center
- Akron Children’s Information Services Department

Mobile Access to Care

Global Aim: Increase availability to care in hard-to-reach populations in the Mahoning Valley.

Specific Aim(s):

Deploy a Mobile Care Unit into the Mahoning Valley

Core Strategies:

- Engage with community partners and agencies to be host-sites for the Mobile Care Unit
- Ensure the Mobile Care Unit is deployed at least 1-2 times per week throughout the region

Key Resources & Partnerships

- Community agencies and organizations
- Ronald McDonald House Charities
- Akron Children’s facilities team

PRIORITY AREA

Health Information

Throughout community engagement efforts for the CHNA, it became clear that caregivers desire and need reliable pediatric health information. While platforms for receiving information are rapidly expanding, families are looking for credible, trusted sources to provide guidance about emerging health topics. Akron Children's has the resources and experienced health professionals to partner with caregivers and share timely and relevant health information with families and the broader community.

The Health Information implementation strategy has one core area of focus for the 2026-2028 cycle that is centered around providing caregivers with the tools and resources needed to make informed decisions about their children's health. Akron Children's has the opportunity to be a trusted voice in the community and ensure families receive accurate health information.

Health Information

Global Aim: Provide reliable, evidence-based health information to empower families to make informed decisions.

Specific Aim(s):

Provide health information through an integrated marketing campaign to address timely health topics

Work with community partners to disseminate health information

Core Strategies:

- Create and implement an integrated marketing and communications plan to address timely health topics
- Engage health departments to share information
- Partner with local school districts to serve as a resource for health information

Key Resources & Partnerships

- Local health departments
- Local school districts
- Local, regional and national media outlets

Conclusion and Next Steps

In addition to the strategies outlined above, each priority health area has a more thorough workplan which details key actions, measures, and responsibilities. These workplan documents serve as the evaluation framework which will be used to measure progress toward the aims. While the aims and strategies will remain constant over the next few years, activities and tactics may be adjusted as needed.

Bi-annual check-ins with the implementation teams will examine recent activities and determine where guidance, support, or adjustment is needed. Progress will be shared more broadly during a community meeting and report-out, held each year during the three-year CHNA cycle. These annual meetings will include the Akron Children's teams working on implementation, as well as community partners and stakeholders.

The priorities issues selected by Akron Children's – mental and behavioral health, access to care, and health information, build on work undertaken and lessons learned over the course of the previous three years. They reflect Akron Children's ongoing commitment to improving the health of children through outstanding quality patient care, education, advocacy, community service and research.

The CHNA Implementation Strategies will be presented to the Akron Children's Board of Director's Executive Committee in early 2026 and will be approved by March 31, 2026. Akron Children's and The Center for Community Solutions are responsible for the accuracy of this report.

The [2025 Community Health Needs Assessment](#) is publicly available on the Akron Children's website.

To request a printed copy, or for questions and/or comments about this report, please contact:

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