

USA HEALTH
CHILDREN'S &
WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

Pediatric Annual Report 2025-26

Bristol Rhodes celebrates the end of her cancer treatment at our annual bell ringing ceremony.



Dear Friends of USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital,

As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with gratitude for the extraordinary physicians, care teams, volunteers, donors and community partners who make our hospital a place of hope and healing for families across our region.

Every day, our team fulfills a mission that extends far beyond medical care. We provide comfort during life's most joyful moments and strength during its most difficult challenges.

From welcoming more than 2,500 newborns into the world to celebrating with dozens of children who completed treatment for cancer, to caring for hundreds of critically ill children and seeing nearly 1,000 premature infants graduate from our world-class neonatal intensive care unit, our commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care remains unwavering.

This year, we continued to build on our legacy as the region's leading provider of specialized care for children and women. Our dedicated teams delivered advanced neonatal, pediatric, and maternal services while embracing innovation, education, and research as part of the academic health system of the University of South Alabama. We also celebrated the remarkable generosity of our community, whose support through Children's Miracle Network and other philanthropic efforts helps us enhance programs, technology and services that directly benefit our patients and their families. Because of such partnerships, our Mapp Child & Family Life Program and our Integrative Care Team continue to expand to better meet the needs of those we serve.

What inspires us most are the stories behind the numbers — the children who overcome extraordinary challenges, the families who find comfort and confidence in our care, and the caregivers whose compassion changes lives every single day.

As we look ahead, we remain focused on advancing healthcare, expanding access to specialized services and improving outcomes for everyone we serve.

Together, we are creating a healthier future for our community, our state and our region.

Sincerely,

Debbie Browning, MSN, RN
Chief Executive Officer

Allen Broome, Pharm.D., MBA
Assistant Administrator of Clinical Operations

Valerie K. Heinl, MHA, MSN, RN, CNL, NE-BC
Chief Nursing Officer

387

air and ground transports

USA HEALTH NEONATAL PEDIATRIC CUB CREW CRITICAL CARE TRANSPORT

To help premature infants and ill or injured children get the care they need, our hospital expanded its neonatal pediatric critical care transport team in 2025 to include air service.

read more about the Cub Crew on page 6

8,300+

pediatric patients admitted annually

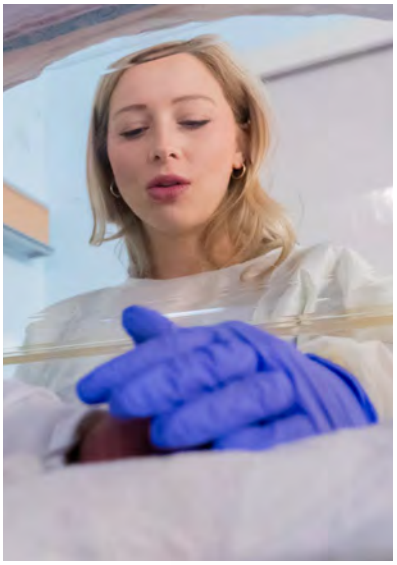
As the state's only stand-alone inpatient facility dedicated to providing the most comprehensive healthcare to children and women, we offer the region's only Level III neonatal intensive care unit and pediatric intensive care unit, where the sickest children receive the most advanced care.



35,000+

children treated annually in the Pediatric Emergency Center

Designed for patients 18 and under, the PEC achieved 100% compliance with Emergency Medical Services for Children Program's National Pediatric Readiness Project. Our board-certified pediatric emergency medicine team provides the best care to patients 24 hours a day, every day.



1,002

newborns admitted to the Level III neonatal intensive care unit in 2025

With a history of saving extremely premature infants, our NICU has one of the best survival rates in the U.S. and beyond when it comes to delivering babies born at 22 weeks and older.

see NICU survival rates on page 5

2,639

babies delivered in 2025

As part of the leading academic health system on the upper Gulf Coast, our hospital is home to the most advanced care for expectant mothers and their babies, including the region's only high-risk maternal-fetal medicine program, with OB/GYN physicians, anesthesia providers, and specialized labor and delivery nurses on site around the clock.



7

full-time certified schoolteachers

who teach

1,200+

patients annually



8

Mapp Child & Family Life Program staff members

This program helps reduce stress for patients and caregivers, support emotional well-being, improve coping skills, promote child development, and strengthen family involvement so patients can achieve better healthcare experiences and outcomes.

read more about the child and family life program on page 26

"Mobile is lucky to have this hospital."

- Raymond Faircloth, grateful parent

read his daughter's story on page 12



12+ Paws of Love visiting pet teams

This research-backed program aims to help patients reduce anxiety and pain, improve mood and emotional well-being, encourage social interaction, and help children and families cope during hospitalization.



PILLAR I: CLINICAL CARE

Delivering advanced, compassionate care for every child

Tiny magnets help restore infant's ability to eat

Thanks to a rare magnet-assisted surgery at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, infant Martin Hernandez is on the path to a healthy life. Born with Type A esophageal atresia — a condition in which the upper and lower sections of the esophagus do not connect — Martin could not feed normally.

After initial procedures to help him eat and prepare his esophagus for repair, pediatric surgeon Aaron Seims, M.D., used an innovative technique pioneered in Germany. During a 30-minute procedure, magnets were placed in the two disconnected sections of Martin's esophagus, gradually drawing them together and creating a natural connection as the tissue healed.

The procedure was successful, allowing Martin's esophagus to function properly. His mother, Maribel Hernandez del Angel, called the treatment a better alternative to another major surgery and expressed gratitude to the medical team. The case highlights the expertise and collaborative care provided at Children's & Women's Hospital for rare and complex conditions.



USA Health surgeon first in state to use new hip implant

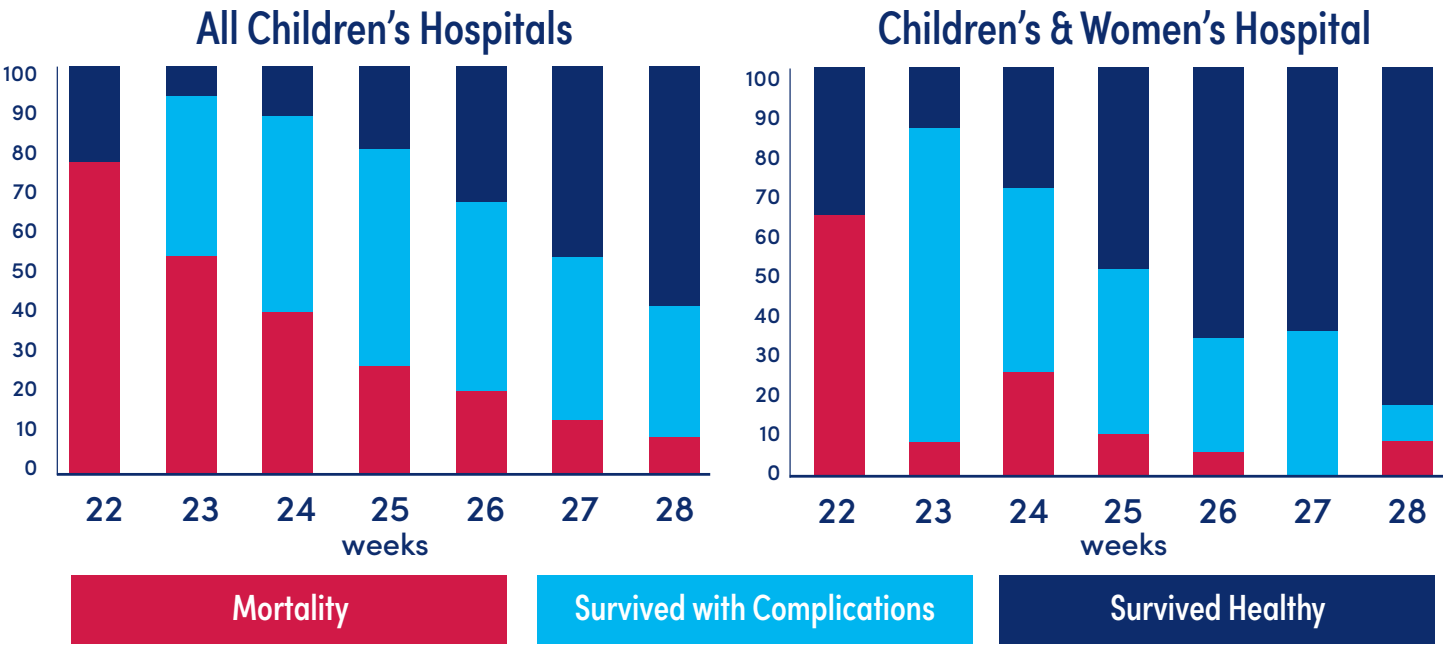
Pediatric orthopaedic surgeon William Cutchen, M.D., became the first physician in Alabama — and among the first in the nation — to use a newly released pediatric hip implant to repair a fracture and correct a deformity in a single procedure. The innovative surgery treated an adolescent girl with a rare femoral neck fracture and coxa vara, improving hip alignment and creating optimal conditions for healing. The advanced implant system, designed specifically for growing patients, offers greater precision and flexibility, marking an important step forward in pediatric orthopaedic care.

First-of-its-kind infusion helps delay type 1 diabetes in young patient

Thanks to a mother's persistence and a physician's careful evaluation, an 8-year-old boy may be able to delay the onset of Type 1 diabetes and avoid years of insulin injections and glucose monitoring. After testing confirmed he was a candidate, pediatric endocrinologists at USA Health administered their first Teplizumab infusion, a 14-day treatment designed to delay symptomatic Type 1 diabetes by up to two years. Approved by the FDA in 2022, Teplizumab is the first therapy shown to slow the progression of the disease, offering children and families more time before facing the daily challenges of diabetes management.



NICU survival rates





Less Invasive, More Precise

A new Interventional Radiology (IR) suite is coming to Children's & Women's Hospital. Using advanced imaging like X-rays and ultrasound to guide specialized tools, IR specialists are able to diagnose and treat conditions like blocked blood vessels and cancers without major surgery. These minimally invasive procedures mean less pain, faster healing, and shorter hospital stays.

The new suite will feature distraction therapy in a calming, child-friendly space for pediatric patients, where patients will gain access to more treatment options with state-of-the-art equipment and precision medicine.



Meeting the Region's Needs

USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital has expanded its neonatal and pediatric critical care transport program, now called Cub Crew, to provide specialized air and ground transport for critically ill newborns and children. The team of specially trained nurses, respiratory therapists and paramedics is available 24/7 and dedicated exclusively to pediatric and neonatal transfers.

The expansion adds helicopter transport to the hospital's long-standing ground service, helping reduce response times and improve access to specialized care across the region.

Comprehensive Pediatric Subspecialties

- Adolescent and Pediatric OB/GYN
- Adolescent Medicine
- Anesthesiology
- Cardiology
- Child Life and Integrative Care
- Complex Care
- Critical Care
- Developmental and Behavioral Medicine
- Emergency Medicine
- Endocrinology
- ENT
- Gastroenterology
- Hematology-Oncology
- Infectious Diseases
- Interventional Radiology
- Neonatal Ophthalmology
- Neonatology
- Nephrology
- Neurology
- Neurosurgery
- Orthopaedics
- Pathology
- Psychiatry
- Pulmonology
- Radiology
- Rehabilitation
- Rheumatology
- Sickle Cell Care
- Surgery
- Urology
- Weight Management and Bariatrics



Beau Wallace, who is nonverbal and on the autism spectrum, enjoys jumping on the trampoline in his backyard.

A weight lifted

Emergency care team provides calm and comfort during crisis

Doctor appointments, dental cleanings and emergency visits can be scary for 9-year-old Beau Wallace. Nonverbal and on the autism spectrum, Beau is a happy, loving boy who experiences the world differently.

"I call him my gentle giant," his mother, Sarah Wallace, said. "He's big for his age. He's a really special kid who is very sweet and brings a lot of love to the world. He just can't verbalize it. He has to show it. He will smother you to death with hugs and kisses."

With a head full of curly brown hair, hazel-green eyes, and a sweet smile, Beau communicates using a tablet and some sign language.

At his home in midtown Mobile, he enjoys jumping on the trampoline, playing with slime, and all things Mickey Mouse. In place of traditional school, Beau attends The CORE Project, which provides year-round education and therapy services.

FAMILY-CENTERED CARE

Over the past year, Beau has visited the Pediatric Emergency Center at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital three times — once for a broken ankle, once for severe abdominal discomfort, and most recently for a painful ear infection that wasn't responding to antibiotics.

Each visit came with its own set of challenges. For Beau, medical settings can be overwhelming — from the bright lights and crowded waiting rooms to unfamiliar faces and long wait times.

"Sometimes we have to walk outside to help him calm back down," Wallace said.

Pediatric emergency physician Reshvinder Dhillon, M.D., said the team in the emergency department is united in its goal of meeting each child where they are. The best way to avoid unnecessary stress or escalation, he noted, is by practicing patience and staying flexible.

"It's always a priority for us in the ED to make sure children like Beau feel as comfortable and safe as possible, especially in what can be an overwhelming environment," Dhillon said. "With kids who are neurodivergent, I always start by asking parents how their child prefers to be approached — whether they like to be touched or need extra space, how they communicate best, and what helps soothe them. Parents know their children better than anyone, and their guidance makes all the difference."

When Beau broke his ankle, he needed X-rays, but staying still was difficult. "He didn't understand what was going on," Wallace recalled, "and he got really combative."

Lauryn Jemison, a radiology technician in the pediatric emergency department, was part of the care team that day.

"For patients like Beau," Jemison said, "we always try to create a calm and predictable environment. We try to slow things down and explain what's going to happen in a way they can understand. That might look like dimming the lights, speaking in a quieter tone, or keeping surroundings as calm as possible. Our main goal is always to make sure they feel seen, supported, and not alone."

That kind of compassion and attentiveness made each visit a little easier, even when the circumstances were uncertain. For example, during a visit for abdominal pain, Beau couldn't explain what hurt.

"When something's wrong, we see it in his behaviors — more anxiety, sometimes more aggression," his mom said. "We were worried it might be an impaction. He was really uncomfortable."

As the family sat in the waiting room, the usual tension began to rise.

Jennifer Bisaga from the hospital's Mapp Child & Family Life Program approached with a simple question: "What can we do to make you more comfortable?"

Bisaga, a Certified Child Life Specialist and Certified Advanced Autism Specialist, first met Beau during triage and helped the team take initial vital signs in a way that worked best for him. That meant using a finger clip pulse oximeter instead of an adhesive one, and taking his temperature with a forehead thermometer — the type with which he was most familiar.

"I try to meet families in the early stages of their emergency visit to establish trust, make the environment sensory-friendly, explain next steps, and assist with consistent care plans to support their specific needs," Bisaga said. "Beau is most comfortable in our chairs versus the hospital bed. We let him choose his comfortable spot in the room and make sure he has things he likes during his visits. I bring in sensory furniture from our sensory room to help him feel supported and safe when any procedures occur."

During Beau's third emergency visit — this time for severe ear pain — the care team knew exactly what he needed.

"One of my favorite moments during Beau's visits with us was being able to provide him with a large stuffed Mickey Mouse to have as a comfort item," Bisaga said. "Beau is one of Mickey's biggest fans, and he held onto him throughout that entire visit."

In a Facebook post dated Sept. 26, 2024, Wallace recounted the experience: "I can't say enough good things about our pediatrician's office and USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital emergency room staff. We have been there way more often lately than I would like, and they are always so kind and accommodating. The ER staff remembered us from last time and got all the things just the way it makes him comfortable. Today they threw in an iPad with all his favorite Mickey episodes and a stuffed Mickey for snuggles. When your child is sensitive to certain surroundings, it means everything."



Beau Wallace's care team offered him a tablet to watch his favorite cartoons and a stuffed Mickey Mouse for comfort.

FEELING SEEN AND SUPPORTED

At the Pediatric Emergency Center, board-certified pediatric emergency medicine specialists and pediatric nursing staff work together to provide the highest level of care for patients and their families.

"Beau's story is a wonderful testament to the importance of combining medical care with other supportive services," Bisaga said. "Child Life is an extra layer of support that can help children have an experience that is truly aligned with their developmental, social, emotional, and sensory needs."

Jemison added, "It truly makes my heart happy to hear when our sweet patients and families have a great experience. I try to cherish each interaction with my patients and take pride in making it the best I possibly can."

As a parent navigating autism in Mobile, Wallace knows how difficult it can be to find resources, especially in a crisis. "There are resources here, but there are a lot of wait lists, and sometimes you just don't know what's available," she said. "There's no manual when you get that diagnosis. You're just trying to figure everything out."

For Wallace, having access to a hospital equipped with staff specially trained to meet Beau's needs makes all the difference.

"It's already a stressor having to bring your child to a place where, in your mind, you already know it is going to be a fight," she said. "But to walk into a place where they say, 'Hey, we see you. We want to make your baby feel comfortable' — that is a weight lifted."



Beau has a magical moment with Mickey Mouse.

> I call him my gentle giant. He's big for his age. He's a really special kid who is very sweet and brings a lot of love to the world.

— Sarah Wallace, Beau's mom




She's a
miracle

Two-month-old Lanier Faircloth was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of bacterial meningitis that kept her hospitalized and fighting for her life for weeks.

Her parents credit the healthcare team at Children's & Women's Hospital and the power of prayer with their daughter's recovery.

A RAPID DECLINE

The day after Christmas, Danielle Faircloth noticed her youngest child – 2-month-old Lanier – seemed lethargic. She was running a fever, refused to take a bottle, and was nearly impossible to wake.

Lanier had visited the pediatrician that day, but Faircloth and her husband, Raymond, bundled her up and headed to the Pediatric Emergency Center at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital.

In the waiting room, the baby began to get worse. The couple didn't know it at the time, but their 8-week-old started having seizures – and likely a stroke. After a CT scan and swift action from the emergency medicine team, Lanier was rushed to the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) upstairs for further treatment.

After multiple blood draws and a lumbar puncture, the infant was diagnosed with Haemophilus influenzae (H. flu) bacterial meningitis, a rare life-threatening condition that causes swelling of the brain and spinal cord and requires aggressive treatment.

For Lanier, that treatment included a feeding tube, a blood transfusion, oxygen to help her breathe, and hundreds of family, friends and strangers praying for her recovery. All told, the baby was hospitalized for 30 days. What happened during that month, her parents said, was nothing short of miraculous.



AN UNEXPECTED TURN

As sunlight streamed through a window at the family's home on a recent afternoon, Danielle Faircloth alternated between holding her daughter close and bouncing the smiling 4-month-old on her lap, recounting the details of Lanier's hospital stay.

The most amazing part, she said, was what happened between the first MRI and the second. Magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI, uses magnets and radio waves to obtain detailed views of soft tissue such as the brain, muscles, and ligaments. Results from Lanier's first MRI showed damage to the frontal lobe of her brain, which can be a result of meningitis. When her parents heard this heartbreaking news, they did not immediately share it with the outside world.

Six days later, on Jan. 7, Danielle Faircloth wrote an email to family and friends about what happened. These are her words:

"The flood of emotions was overwhelming and beyond terrifying, but we continued to pray and never once gave up hope for Lanier's future. We kept our head down, knowing that whatever came our way, we were going to face head on and tackle this no matter what our future may look like. We kept this news personal and were hesitant to share because we knew God had other plans...

"This morning around 11 a.m. we received what I like to call a miracle. Lanier's most recent MRI scans show the infection has cleared, and the brain damage is no longer visible. There are no words, there are no answers. Maybe it's the new medication she's been given; maybe it was the blood transfusion, but maybe – and most likely – it was faith.

"Our road to recovery has now opened up, and we are beginning to see the most beautiful light. I close my eyes and I see my little girl running, laughing, playing, and doing all the little things girls do. I know that one day she is going to have one hell of a testimony! Tomorrow is a new day, and we will continue to speak to doctors and make a new plan for her path to recovery. We are oh so blessed and forever grateful."

STEPS TOWARD RECOVERY

The next day, Jan. 8, after two weeks of enduring fevers and seizures and more, Lanier was finally strong enough to breathe and eat on her own. As a result, her medical team decided to remove her oxygen and feeding tube and transfer her out of intensive care into a regular room.

While she still needed powerful antibiotics and anti-seizure medication, her prognosis was headed in the right direction. During the next week, her parents worked with the healthcare team as their daughter, now a 3-month-old, re-learned how to take a bottle, among other achievements.

Lanier was also marking other important milestones. She transitioned from intravenous to oral medications, not any easy undertaking for a 12-week-old. And she was well enough to begin seeing more members of USA Health's multidisciplinary healthcare team so they could determine what potential follow-up care would be needed at home.

On Jan. 12, Lanier was visited by an audiologist who was able to administer a test for hearing loss. The screening was inconclusive, her parents said, so more tests were scheduled. Bacterial meningitis is a leading cause of hearing loss, impacting up to 54% of survivors, research shows.

For those who battle bacterial meningitis, other health issues can also persist. Lanier will continue to take anti-seizure medications as she is monitored and treated by a medical team that includes a neurologist, immunologist, physical therapist, audiologist, and her pediatrician.

Benjamin Estrada, M.D., a pediatric infectious diseases specialist at Children's & Women's Hospital, worked quickly to determine what was making baby Lanier so sick in the early days of her hospitalization. Testing confirmed that the cause of her meningitis was a type of Haemophilus influenzae.

Before the 1990s, this bacterial infection was a common cause of severe meningitis, but it became much less frequent after the introduction of the Haemophilus influenzae type B vaccine. However, because the vaccine only protects against the type B strain, other Heamophilus influenzae strains remain a prevalent cause of meningitis among infants and young children.

It's still rare. Depending on the location, a pediatrician could go years – even decades – without seeing such cases in infants or small children. In most places where surveillance has been performed in the U.S., fewer than 5 in 100,000 children typically develop bacterial meningitis, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"I'm so incredibly happy for her remarkable recovery," Estrada said.



Results from Lanier's second MRI showed no damage to her brain's frontal lobe.

IN THE BEST HANDS

On Jan. 26, nearly a month after rushing to the hospital, Lanier and her parents got the green light to leave. Their older children, Brenton, Jack, and Mac, welcomed them home with open arms and more than a few hugs.

Danielle Faircloth wrote this message to share the good news:

"After 30 days, we are finally home, healthy and on the mend! I have no doubt in my mind that if it weren't for the wonderful doctors, PAs, nurses, and staff at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, and most importantly the prayers from family and friends, Lanier would not be with us today. We are forever grateful!

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)"



Lanier shares a moment with pediatric ICU nurse Stephanie Rollins at Children's & Women's Hospital.

In the weeks the family has been back together, Lanier continues to sleep through the night, sometimes logging 12 hours in her nursery. She loves to watch her canine companions, Ozzy and Pickles, scamper around the house as they keep a close watch on the youngest family member.

Looking back on their daughter's struggles, the parents recall mixed feelings about saying goodbye to the caregivers who helped her heal.

"We felt safe," Lanier's dad said. "And the fact that it's right down the street. Mobile is lucky to have this hospital."

Danielle Faircloth said she was sad to leave because they had gotten so close to the staff. "When we were at Children's & Women's, I felt like 'I can do this' because she was in the best hands. I knew y'all had it."

"Mobile is lucky to have this hospital."



PILLAR II:
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

Building healthier communities through partnership and outreach





Building Stronger Communities

With a commitment to supporting the health and well-being of children beyond our hospital walls, we continue to expand our network of ambulatory clinics and community outreach activities to promote healthier, safer communities by equipping young people and parents with practical guidance and support resources because every child deserves the opportunity to grow up healthy, confident, and supported.

196
gun locks distributed

200
children educated in Stop the Bleed

514
life jackets distributed

458
car seat checks

269
car seats distributed

32
certified car seat technicians

75
children (ages 11-14) trained in Safe Sitter classes

86
people attended infant CPR and car seat safety classes

1,324
people educated about water safety

5,400 people reached at health and safety fairs





USA Health launches mobile clinic to serve students at LeFlore Magnet High School

To expand healthcare access for local students and families, providers from USA Health Adolescent and Young Adult Health launched a weekly health clinic at LeFlore Magnet High School.

"By bringing USA Health's adolescent providers directly to students, we can address health needs more quickly and compassionately without requiring them to leave campus for a doctor's appointment," said Natalie Fox, DNP, PNP-BC, CEO of USA Health. "This improves access, keeps students in class, and connects them to our academic health system, allowing for earlier detection and treatment of health issues."

Research shows school-based health centers can reduce emergency room visits and hospitalizations while improving health outcomes, attendance and academic success.

"We are excited about the launch of a new mobile health clinic on campus," said Antonio Williams, EdD, LeFlore's principal. "The clinic will provide wellness checks, sick visits and preventive care, helping students stay healthy, focused and ready to learn. This initiative reflects our commitment to removing barriers to healthcare and supporting student well-being."

"This improves access, keeps students in class, and connects them to our academic health system, allowing for earlier detection and treatment of health issues."

- Natalie Fox, USA Health CEO

USA Health providers will see patients in a mobile clinic on Tuesday mornings during the school year. Appointments will be coordinated through the school nurse.

The University of South Alabama and USA Health have a long history of serving students in Mobile's Toulminville community. In 2016, the Mobile County Public School System partnered with USA Health's Family Medicine division to establish a Student Health Services Center on the LeFlore campus.

Through that partnership, USA Health providers, including Pamela Pickens-Taylor, DNP, CRNP, have provided services such as sports physicals. Pickens-Taylor, recently honored with a Women's History Month Award from the City of Mobile, also mentors high school students interested in healthcare careers.

"Pamela's passion for adolescent health and education makes her an ideal addition to our team at LeFlore," said Benjamin Estrada, M.D., interim chair of pediatrics at USA. "Her compassion and commitment to teaching and caring for students reflect her mission to make a lasting impact."

USA Health performs free sports physicals



More than 1,000 Mobile County high school athletes and band members visited the University of South Alabama Mitchell Center for annual sports physicals, EKG screenings and CPR demonstrations.

USA Health Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine providers and residents, family medicine residents, pediatric residents and adolescent medicine providers, with support from USA nursing and physician assistant students, evaluated participants. Students received screenings that included height and weight measurements, vision checks, blood pressure assessments, heart and lung evaluations, and orthopaedic screenings. Medical professionals were also available to discuss health concerns and answer questions before the start of athletic training and band activities.

"The annual sports physical event for high school athletes remains one of the strongest examples of our collaboration with schools in the community," said Peter Rippey, M.D., CAQSM, a sports medicine physician at USA Health and assistant professor of family medicine at USA's Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. Rippey also serves as medical director and team physician for South Alabama Athletics. "By offering comprehensive screenings, including EKGs, we help ensure student athletes are healthy, prepared and able to begin training safely and on schedule."

Instructors and students from the USA Department of Emergency Medical Services provided 375 EKG screenings in partnership with Who We Play For, a Florida-based nonprofit organization. An EKG records the heart's electrical activity and can help identify conditions associated with an increased risk of sudden cardiac arrest.

Students also participated in CPR and AED demonstrations led by representatives from the American Heart Association and Mobile Fire Rescue Department. USA Health serves as the official sports medicine provider for 14 area high schools.



Celebrating our tiniest patients

Hundreds of former patients and their families gathered at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital for the 2026 NICU Reunion, celebrating the milestones and achievements of children who once received care in the neonatal intensive care unit.

The hospital is home to the region's only Level III NICU, a 98-bed unit that cares for extremely premature and critically ill newborns, including infants born as early as 22 weeks gestation.

Each year, about 1,000 babies graduate from the NICU, which is recognized for its strong outcomes and commitment to quality care. Because many infants remain in the unit for months, families often form lasting relationships with caregivers and other parents.

The NICU team includes neonatologists, nurses, educators and therapists dedicated to caring for the region's most fragile patients.

"Our annual NICU reunion is one of the most meaningful days we have all year," said Cathy McCurley, BSN, RN, nurse manager for the NICU. "For parents, it is a chance to reconnect with caregivers, and for our staff, seeing these children thriving reminds us why we do this."



PILLAR III: EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP

Advancing knowledge. Training the next generation.

Career Pathways // in the past 10 years:



45%

of pediatric resident graduates entered general pediatrics

55%

of pediatric resident graduates pursued pediatric subspecialty training and practice



Training tomorrow's pediatric leaders

At USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, caring for children extends far beyond today's patients. As part of the academic health system for the University of South Alabama, the hospital is also preparing the next generation of pediatric physicians and other healthcare providers who will care for children and families throughout the upper Gulf Coast and beyond.

The hospital's pediatric residency program combines rigorous clinical training with a supportive learning environment designed to foster professional growth and leadership. Residents train in a free-standing hospital dedicated exclusively to the healthcare needs of children and women, gaining experience across inpatient, outpatient, emergency, and specialty care settings.

Infectious disease pediatrician Haidee Custodio, M.D., FAAP, who also serves as an associate professor of pediatrics at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine, serves as director of the program where a close-knit culture helps set it apart. Faculty members are highly accessible and engaged, creating an atmosphere where learning happens through collaboration, mentorship, and hands-on experience. Weekly in-person conferences encourage open discussion and communication among residents, faculty, and community pediatricians.

By training in teaching hospitals and at medical clinics, new physicians can learn in an environment that integrates education, research, and patient care — an experience offering benefits to the healthcare staff and those they care for. Research shows patients treated in teaching hospitals had up to 20% higher odds of survival, compared to those treated at non-teaching hospitals, noted the Association of American Medical Colleges.

The three-year pediatrics residency and four-year medicine-pediatrics residency programs at USA Health are university-based initiatives designed to prepare residents to enter practice as general pediatricians or continue training in a subspecialty.

The program attracts graduates from U.S. and international allopathic medical schools and U.S. osteopathic medical schools, reflecting its commitment to developing a diverse and talented physician workforce.



Pediatric spine team shines at national scoliosis meeting

USA Health neurosurgeon Richard Menger, M.D., MPA, chief of complex spine surgery, and orthopaedic surgeon Tyler McDonald, M.D., chief of pediatric orthopaedics, represented the health system's complex pediatric spine program at the Scoliosis Research Society's 60th Annual Meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The international conference brought together about 1,500 spine specialists to discuss advances in spinal deformity care.

"We are really proud of our combined neurosurgery-orthopaedic pediatric complex spine program where our departments work together to offer our patients unique and elevated treatments right here on the Gulf Coast," said Menger. "Attending and presenting at the SRS meeting allow us to bring the latest techniques and science to our patients."

Through their participation, Menger and McDonald highlighted USA Health's commitment to innovation in pediatric and complex spine care, helping bring world-class expertise to patients across the Gulf Coast.



Transforming medical education and research

Rising on the campus of the University of South Alabama, the new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine will unite advanced medical education and leading-edge research under one roof. The 295,000-square-foot facility is designed to expand physician training, foster innovation, and strengthen healthcare across Alabama and the Gulf Coast for generations to come.

Children's & Women's Hospital receives grant for neonatal abstinence syndrome

USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital has received funding through the City of Mobile's opioid settlement grants to enhance care for infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).

The Mobile City Council approved $2.2 million for 16 organizations addressing the opioid crisis.

The grant will be administered by Manimaran Ramani, M.D., professor of pediatrics and division chief of neonatology, with Saminathan Anbalagan, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics and neonatologist, serving as co-administrator.

The funding will support implementation of the Eat, Sleep, Console care framework, an evidence-based approach that helps reduce hospital stays for infants experiencing opioid withdrawal without increasing adverse outcomes.

The NICU staff includes a multidisciplinary team of neonatologists, nurses, educators, and therapists, all dedicated to providing the best care for the region's tiniest patients.

PILLAR IV:
PHILANTHROPY

Investing in children. Empowered by generosity.



USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital welcomed Rainier, its first full-time facility dog, to provide comfort and support for pediatric patients, families and staff. The program is made possible by annual donations from Spirit of Children and Spirit Halloween Stores, a longtime hospital partner that helps fund projects within the Mapp Child & Family Life Program.





USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital is a proud Children's Miracle Network partner hospital. Every dollar raised through local CMN partner campaigns - whether by rounding up at the register, during a donation drive, or joining a fundraising event - stays here to help kids in our community.

Children's Miracle Network Hospitals®

DeVyn, Our Brave Little Fighter

When doctors told us our daughter, DeVyn, had T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia in March 2024, our world stopped. In that moment of fear and uncertainty, we could not have imagined the journey ahead. But God led us to a place called The Hope, the pediatric infusion center at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital. It is more than a hospital. It is where love wraps the soul, where families carry one another, and where faith is renewed daily.

Since her diagnosis, DeVyn has endured countless rounds of chemotherapy, spinal taps, and hospital stays. Yet she continues to shine. In The Hope, we have spent more hours than we can count. But what we can count on every single time is the unwavering compassion of the nurses, the encouragement of child life specialists, and the precise brilliance of the medical team. We have heard laughter ring out in infusion chairs that should only know pain. We have seen my daughter smile after chemo because someone here made her feel like more than a patient. They made her feel like she was still a child. That is holy work.

Even in her hardest days, she sings to her family, prays over her friends in the infusion chairs beside her, and makes her care team laugh. She reminds me — and everyone she meets — that joy is possible even in the hardest moments.

That is why she was chosen as the hospital's 2025 Children's Miracle Network Champion. CMN Champions tell the stories of kids like ours, raising awareness and support so that every dollar given through campaigns at Publix, Walmart, Sam's Club, Dairy Queen, and other partners goes to support Children's & Women's Hospital. She spent the past year visiting each store, personally thanking the teams for their support.

We know that hope is complicated. It doesn't erase the suffering or the setbacks. But what we've learned is that even when hope wavers, faith carries us. DeVyn is proof of that — our little warrior with the biggest heart. If her story does anything, we pray it reminds others that even in the darkest valleys, you are not alone.

- Brittany and Du Coker
Parents to the bravest girl we know

For nearly 40 years, Children's Miracle Network partnerships have raised more than $11 million to support patients and families at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital.

The Care

Supporting children



SOOTHING SOUNDS
Music therapist Sonya Amacker gently strums a guitar for an infant, using rhythm and melody to promote comfort, connection and healing.

Beyond Care

during their hospital stays

FOR CHILDREN, a stay in the hospital doesn't have to be a scary experience. The Mapp Child & Family Life Program – comprising child life specialists, therapeutic recreational specialists, certified schoolteachers, an arts and activities coordinator, and a music therapist – work to make each day as normal and comfortable as possible at Children's & Women's Hospital.



PREPARING THROUGH PLAY
Child life specialist Brenda Maddox, right, uses toy medical equipment to walk a young patient through what to expect before a procedure, helping replace fear with familiarity and confidence.



SENSORY COMFORT
Child life specialists use the sensory room at our Pediatric Emergency Center as a calming place to help reduce anxiety for children facing stressful emergency visits.





LEARNING DOESN'T STOP
(Above) In the Pediatric Emergency Center, child life specialist Melissa Alidor uses imaginative play to demonstrate what may happen when medical staff visit. (Left) Through ClassAct – a school embedded in the hospital – teachers serve the educational needs of up to 1,200 students each year. (Below) Creating art helps hospitalized children express emotions and regain a sense of control.





THERAPY ANIMALS PROVIDE COMFORT
Child life specialists collaborate with volunteers to organize visits from specially trained therapy pets like Skye, a golden retriever. Research shows the presence of animals can be soothing, helping to reduce anxiety and lower blood pressure.



CREATING SPECIAL BONDS
Beth Abston, a therapeutic recreational specialist, checks in with a patient during her weekly infusion appointment at the pediatric infusion center at Children's & Women's Hospital.



Servant leadership defines new USA Health CEO

Natalie Fox, named the new CEO of USA Health in 2025, grew up in tiny York, Alabama.

It was there in Sumter County, where her parents worked in healthcare administration — at a rural nursing home and a community hospital — that her career path first took shape.

She saw their dedication to helping others and wanted to follow in their footsteps.

Seven mission trips to Honduras and a summer internship with a rural ministry after high school sealed the deal. Fox decided to become a nurse.

"I went to a developing country on mission trips, and it really wasn't until the summer that I was local — I was working with people who lived right down the road – that I never knew also had needs both big and small," she says. "We were able to bring together people to help meet those needs."

So, Fox left York for Mobile, where she earned three degrees from the University of South Alabama. Her first job at USA Health involved meeting the needs of children. Later, she served as a nurse practitioner for teenagers. Working in adolescent medicine, she says, taught her what it means to really put patients front and center.

After earning a Doctor of Nursing degree, Fox transitioned to administrative roles within the academic health system, which still allows her to provide patient-centered care, just in a different way.

As she moved up, accolades poured in. Most recently, Fox was named to the 2026 Class of Women Who Shape the State by al.com, an honor recognizing leaders whose work is making a lasting impact in Alabama and beyond. In 2024, she was one of 42 people named nationally to Becker's Hospital Review Rising Stars: Healthcare Leaders Under 40 List.

"Dr. Fox's recognition is a testament to her exceptional leadership, integrity and commitment to service," said USA President Jo Bonner. "She leads with purpose and compassion, and her work continues to strengthen USA Health's mission while improving the health and well-being of the communities we serve."

Servant leadership continues to define her: "I want healthcare to be better for our children and for generations to come," she said. "I want people to have access to healthcare where they are and to be able to reach healthy outcomes no matter the circumstances."

2025 United Way Outstanding Partner Agency



United Way of Southwest Alabama named Children's & Women's Hospital its 2025 Outstanding Partner Agency during an awards ceremony, recognizing the hospital's commitment to strengthening families and improving child development across the region.

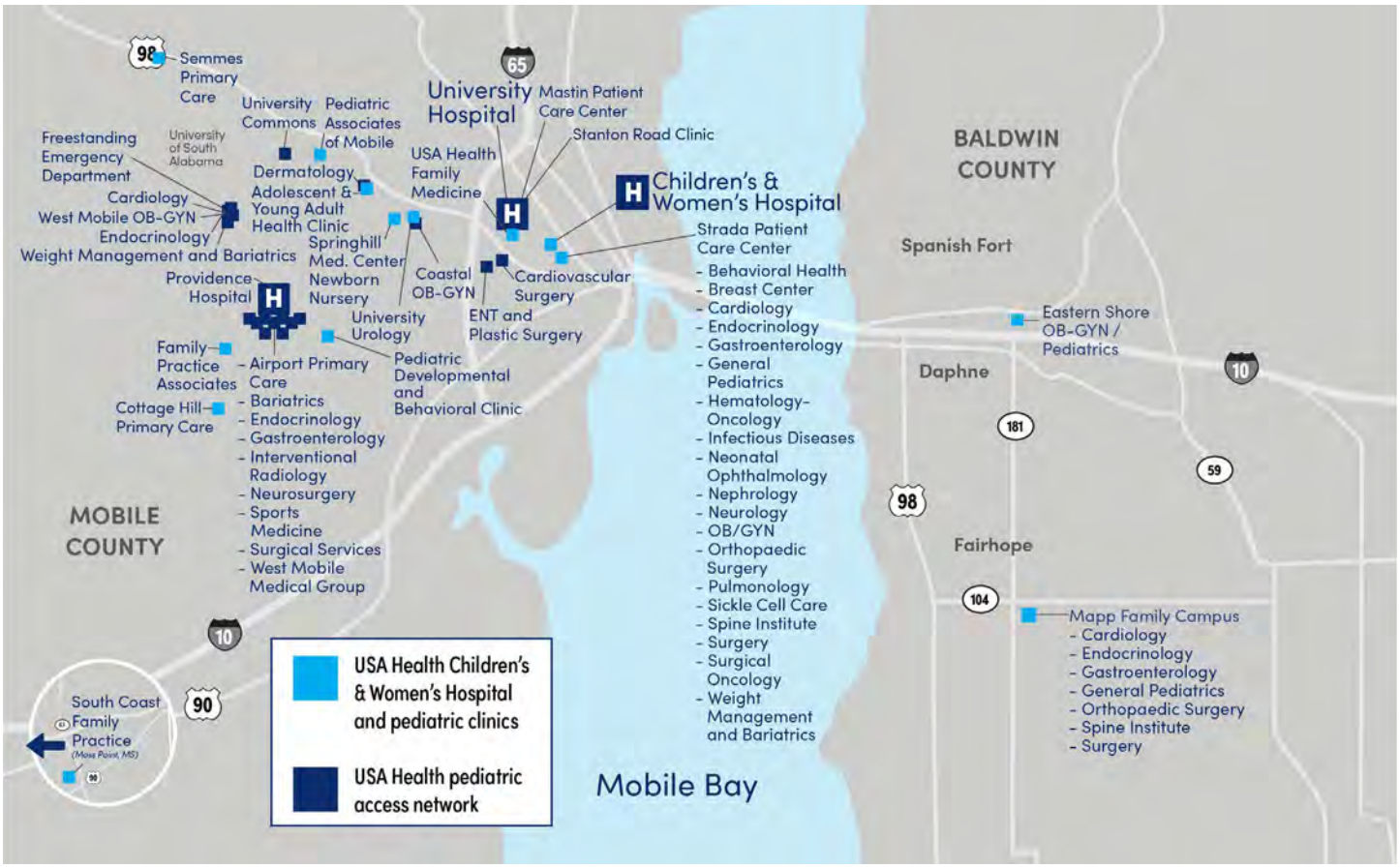
The hospital earned the honor for its leadership in promoting The Basics Southwest Alabama, a United Way initiative that equips parents and caregivers with evidence-based strategies to support children's learning and brain development from birth to age 5. Hospital staff also connect families with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which provides free monthly books to children from birth to age 5.

"We are so honored to be recognized as United Way's Outstanding Partner Agency," said Debbie Browning, MSN, RN, chief executive officer of Children's & Women's Hospital. "This recognition highlights the commitment of our dedicated team members, who not only care for patients but also help strengthen families and create brighter futures for our community."

Over the past year, participation in The Basics increased by 290%, a milestone United Way attributed to the hospital's efforts to introduce the program throughout pediatric services, including the neonatal intensive care unit and pediatric emergency center.

The University of South Alabama leads one the largest campaigns for United Way each year, raising more than $150,000 in 2025.

Expanding to serve our community





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