Regional Data Report

DEMOGRAPHICS AND HEALTH CARE ACCESS, 2026

Health Council of WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA

Who We Are

The health councils were created in 1983 by Florida Statute to identify, address and resolve health care issues of local concern. Each of the 11 health councils are private, non-profit organization governed by a Board of Directors. County Commissioners appoint the Board members to represent the concerns of health care consumers, providers, and purchasers.

The Health Council of West Central Florida, Inc. (HCWCF) serves Hardee, Highlands, Hillsborough, Manatee and Polk counties. Our mission is to advance community health in West Central Florida through trusted data, planning, and regional collaboration.

The Council has extensive experience working with for-profit and non-profit agencies, public health organizations, consumers and professionals. Collaboration and cooperation are critical to the success of our mission.

To Learn More About the Health Council

Visit our website - Home - Health Council of West Central Florida

Or Contact Us:

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Introduction

This report is the first in a series that will address specific health topics on a regional basis by providing data to our partners and community members.

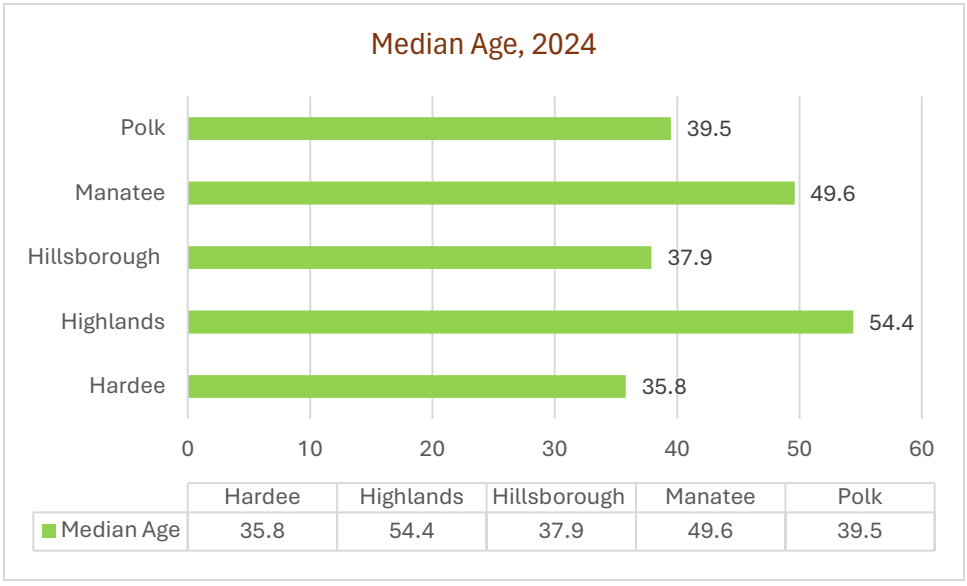
The Health of West Central Florida is defined not only by the unique characteristics of each county, but also by the connections that bring our communities together. Residents of Hardee, Highlands, Hillsborough, Manatee, and Polk counties routinely cross county lines to work, attend school, seek medical care, visit loved ones, and access essential services. Health systems, workforce, transportation networks, and community resources are similarly interconnected. **Health doesn't stop at county lines, and neither should our understanding of the factors that influence it.**

The **Health Council of West Central Florida Regional Health Data Reports** offer a comprehensive look at the demographic, social, economic, environmental, and health factors affecting the well-being of the region's more than 2.4 million residents. By combining reliable, locally relevant data, the report presents a regional perspective while acknowledging each county's unique strengths and challenges.

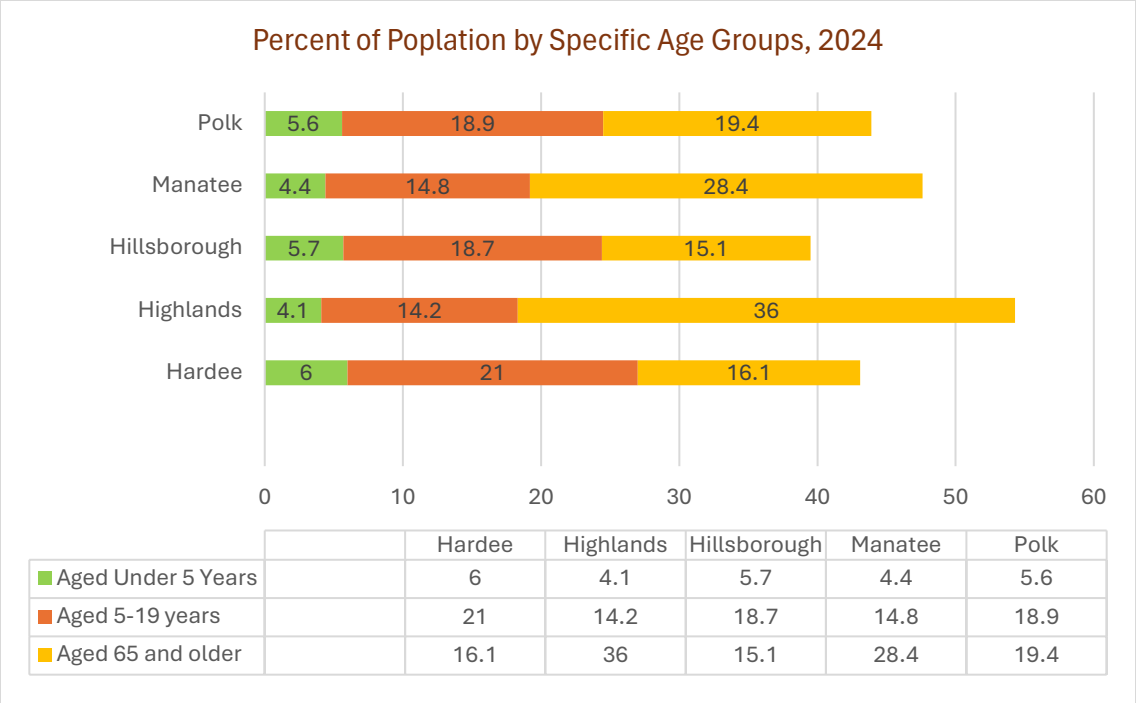
Regional data provides a broader understanding of trends that transcend jurisdictional boundaries, helping identify opportunities for collaboration and more effective use of resources. Whether addressing access to primary care, chronic disease, maternal and child health, behavioral health, emergency preparedness, or the social drivers of health, lasting improvements require coordinated action among health care providers, public health agencies, community-based organizations, local governments, and residents.

This report is intended to serve as a trusted resource for planning, decision-making, and partnership development. We hope it supports community health assessments, strategic planning, grant development, and policy discussions while fostering a shared commitment to improving health outcomes throughout Hardee, Highlands, Hillsborough, Manatee, and Polk counties. By working together and viewing health through a regional lens, we can create healthier, more resilient communities for current and future generations.

Demographics

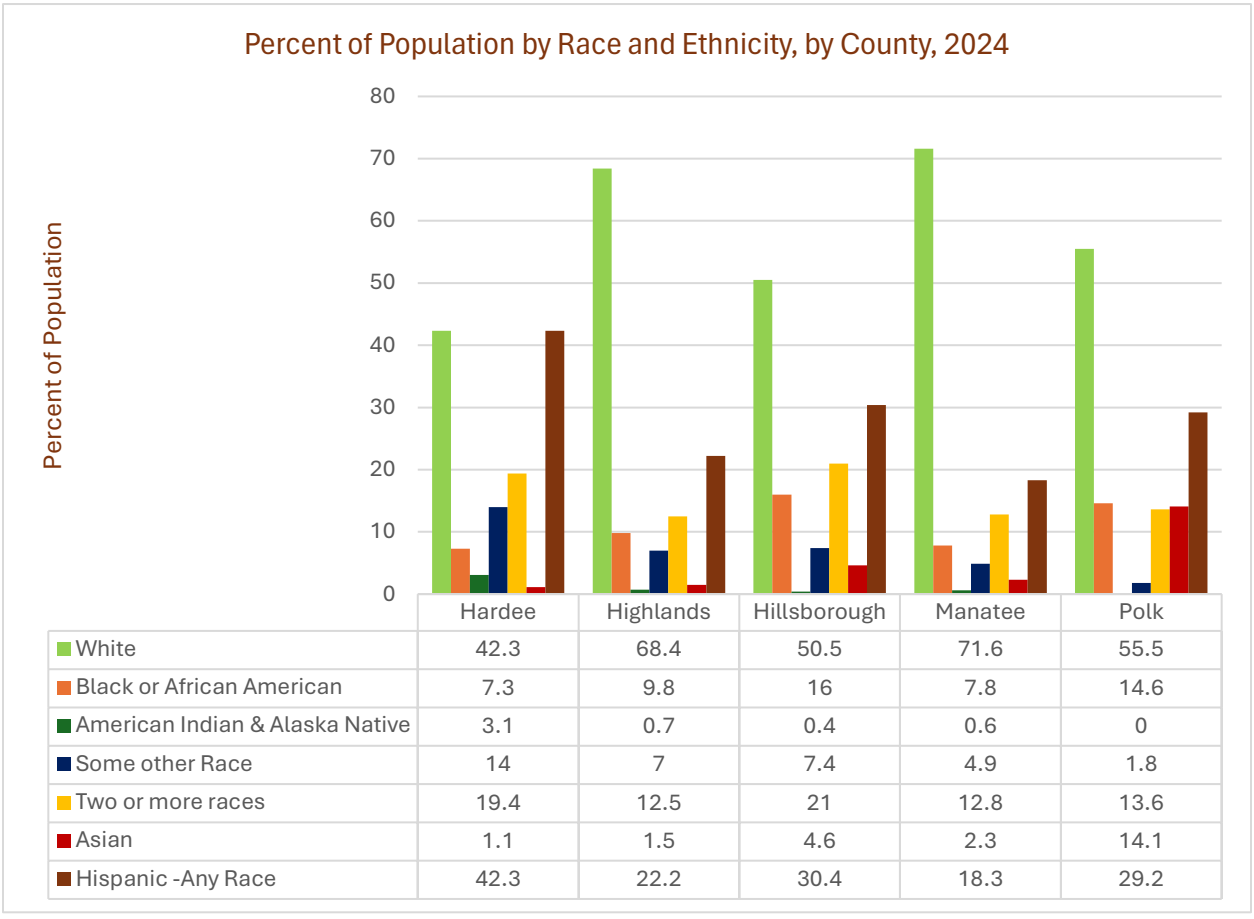


Source: United States Census Bureau



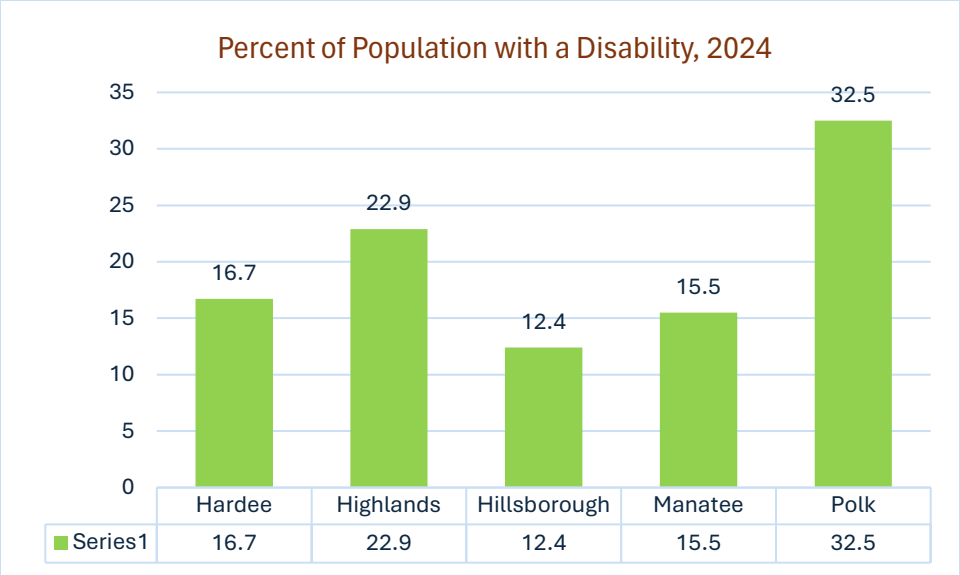
	Hardee	Highlands	Hillsborough	Manatee	Polk
Aged Under 5 Years	6	4.1	5.7	4.4	5.6
Aged 5-19 years	21	14.2	18.7	14.8	18.9
Aged 65 and older	16.1	36	15.1	28.4	19.4

Source: United States Census Bureau



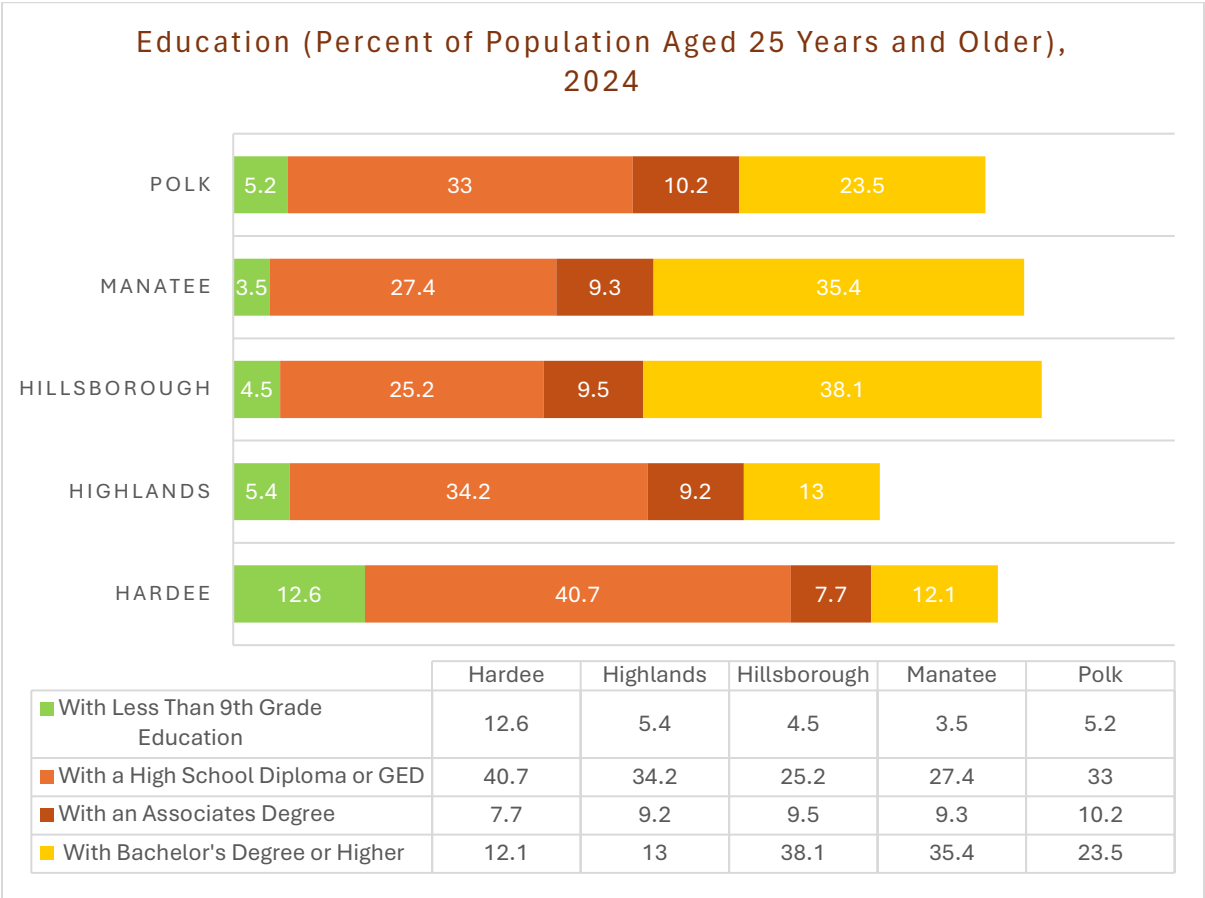
	Hardee	Highlands	Hillsborough	Manatee	Polk
White	42.3	68.4	50.5	71.6	55.5
Black or African American	7.3	9.8	16	7.8	14.6
American Indian & Alaska Native	3.1	0.7	0.4	0.6	0
Some other Race	14	7	7.4	4.9	1.8
Two or more races	19.4	12.5	21	12.8	13.6
Asian	1.1	1.5	4.6	2.3	14.1
Hispanic -Any Race	42.3	22.2	30.4	18.3	29.2

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates



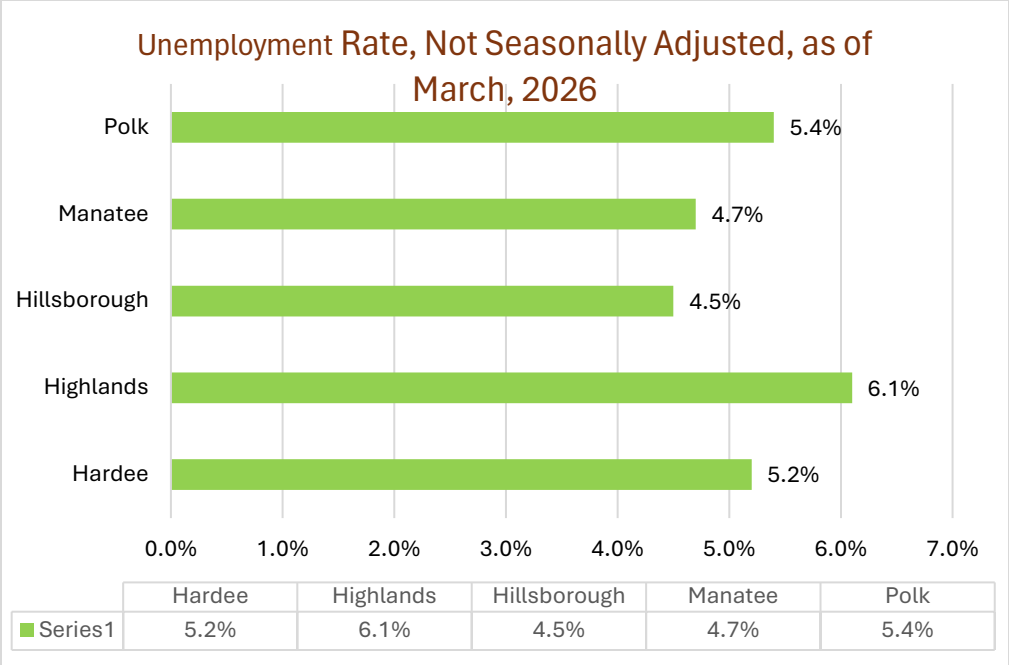
Source: United States Census Bureau

Social and Economic Factors



	Hardee	Highlands	Hillsborough	Manatee	Polk
With Less Than 9th Grade Education	12.6	5.4	4.5	3.5	5.2
With a High School Diploma or GED	40.7	34.2	25.2	27.4	33
With an Associates Degree	7.7	9.2	9.5	9.3	10.2
With Bachelor's Degree or Higher	12.1	13	38.1	35.4	23.5

Source: United States Census Bureau



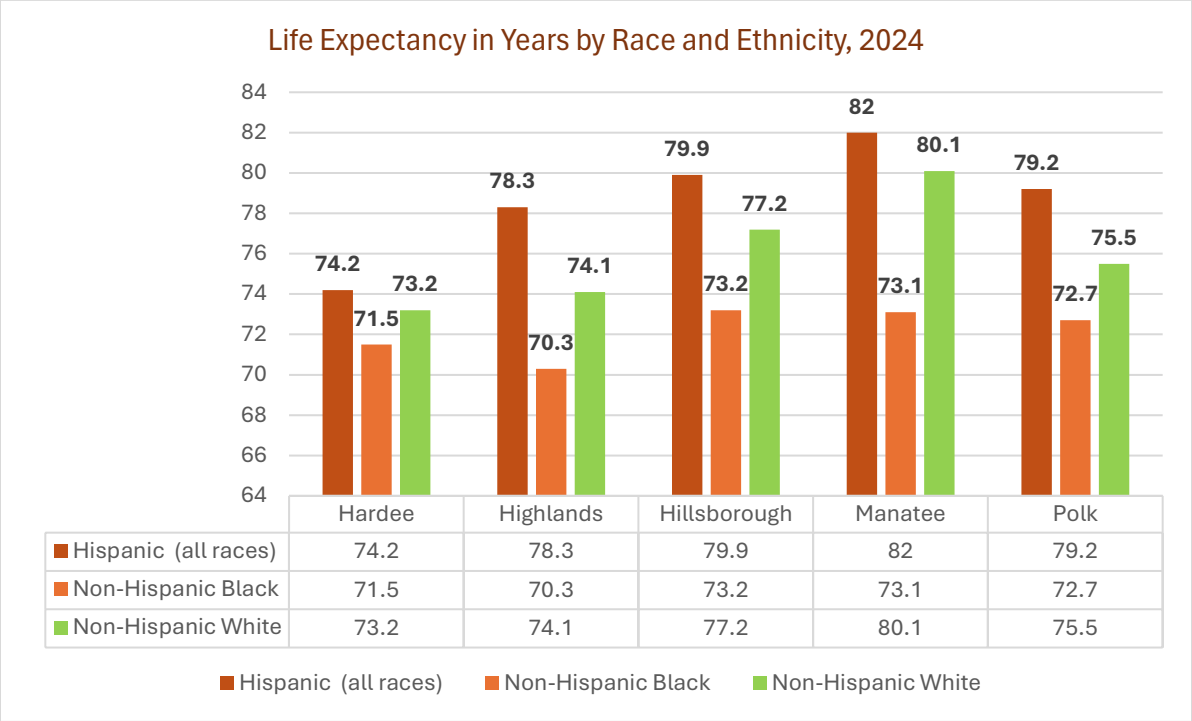
Source: United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2026

Economic Factors by County

Indicator	Hardee	Highlands	Hillsborough	Manatee	Polk
Median Household Income	$ 60,489	$ 54,897	$ 79,540	$ 78,457	$ 65,978
Households With Supplemental Security Income	6.4%	6.5%	4.6%	3.8%	5.7%
Households With Cash Public Assistance Income	2.8%	2.1%	2%	1.7%	2.7%
Households With Food Stamp SNAP Benefits	24.9%	15.7%	13.3%	7.5%	14.6%
Families Below Poverty Level	20.3%	10.9%	9.2%	5.9%	11%
Households below ALICE guidelines 2023	53%	53%	46%	42%	46%
Families Below Poverty Level with Related Children (Families with Children Aged 0-17 Years)	30%	15%	12.9%	10%	17.6%
Individuals With Incomes Less Than 185% of Poverty Level	39.9%	34.5%	26.7%	23.3%	32.5%

Source: United States Census Bureau; www.unitedforalice.org

Health Status

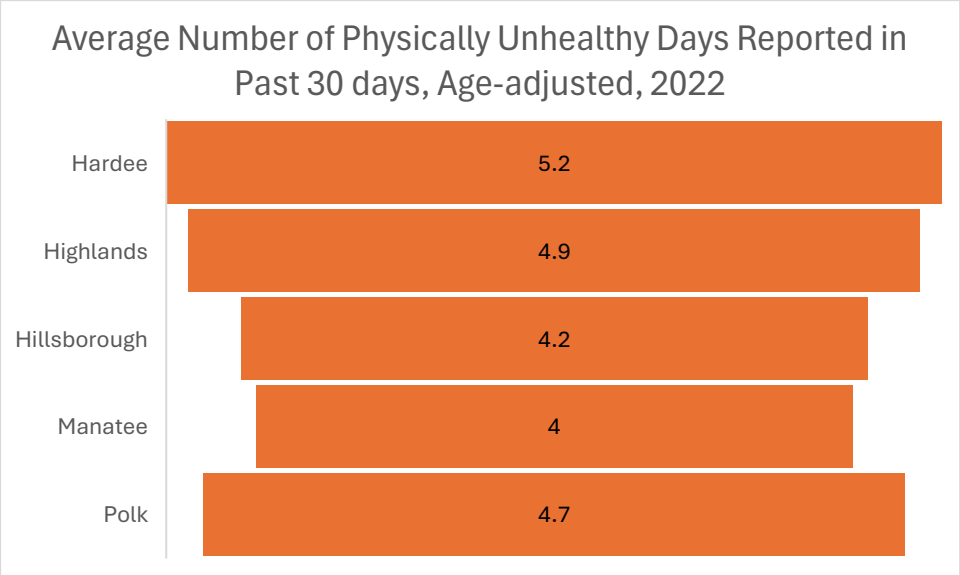


Source: FLHealthCHARTS, Florida Bureau of Vital Statistics and Office of Economic and Demographic Research

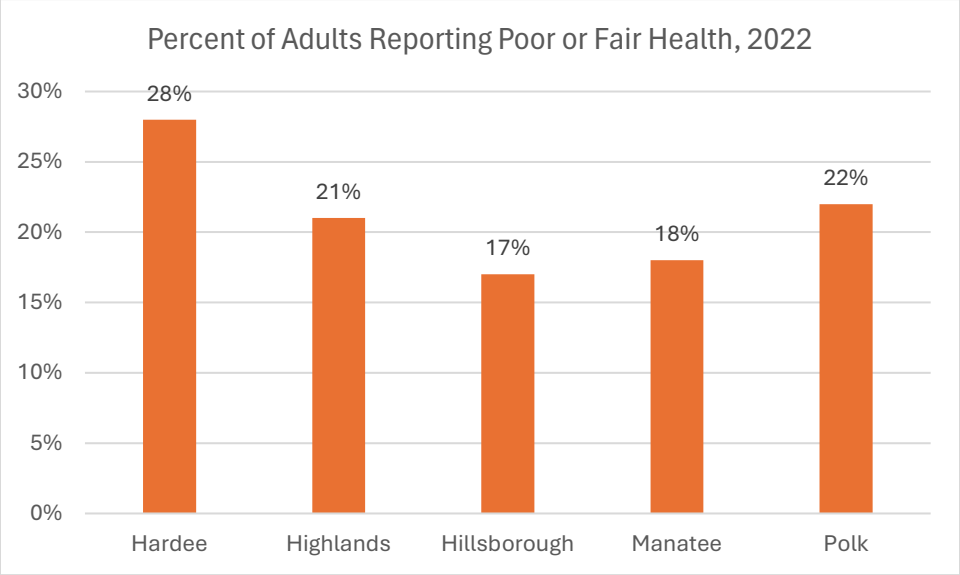
Top Five Leading Causes of Death, Age-adjusted by County, 2024

Rank	Hardee	Highlands	Hillsborough	Manatee	Polk
1	Heart Disease	Heart Disease	Heart Disease	Heart Disease	Cancer
2	Cancer	Cancer	Cancer	Cancer	Heart Disease
3	Diabetes	Stroke	Unintentional Injury	Stroke	Stroke
4	Unintentional Injury	Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (CLRD)	Stroke	Unintentional Injury	Unintentional Injury
5	Stroke	Unintentional Injury	Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (CLRD)	Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (CLRD)	Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (CLRD)

Source: Florida Bureau of Vital Statistics



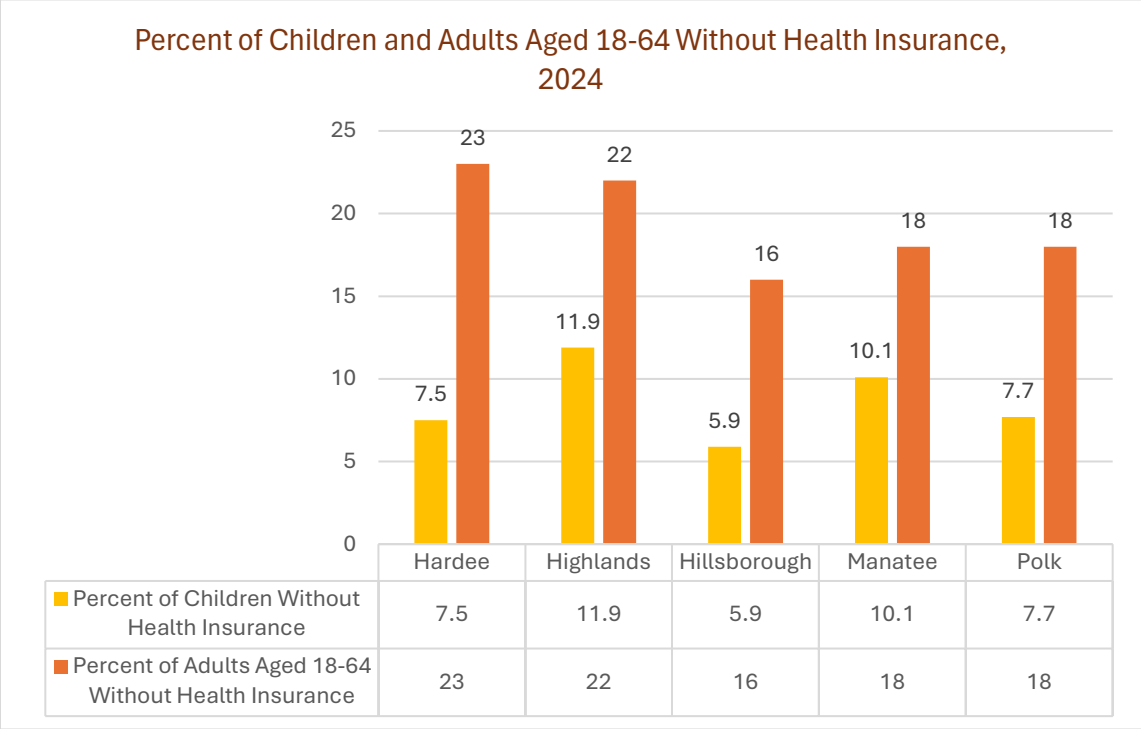
Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2022



Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2022

Access to Care

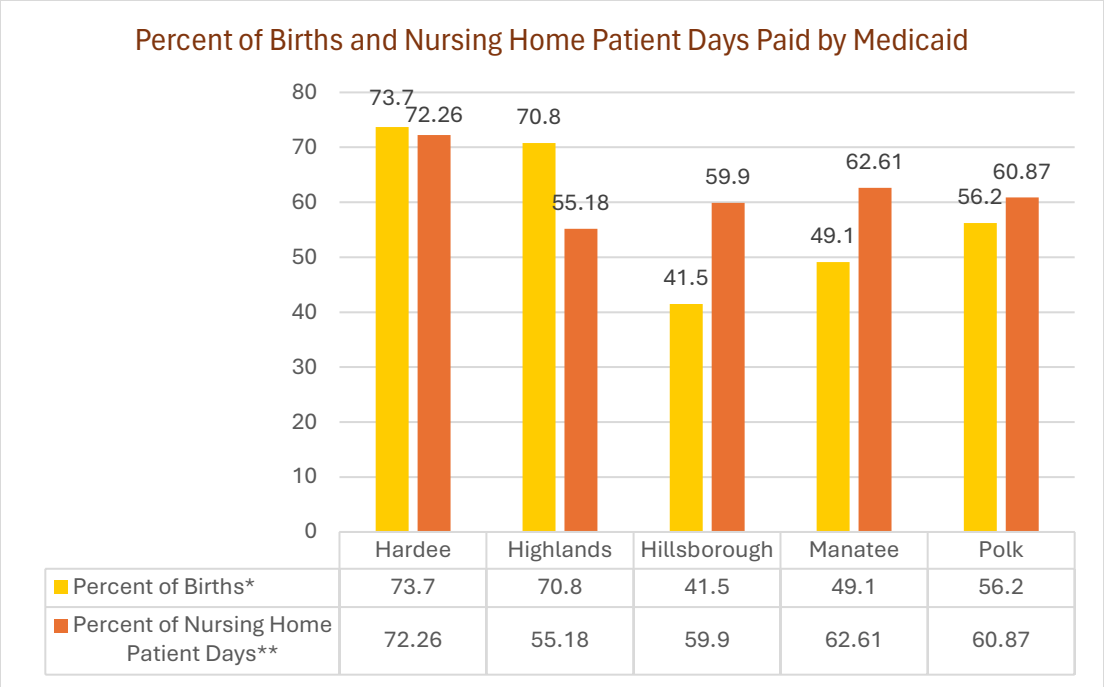
Health Insurance is a critical factor in accessing care. Florida continues to have the largest number of people enrolled in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) compared to any other states. However, with the rollback of premium subsides, Florida also experienced the largest net drop in enrollment of any state in 2026 at 261,115 individuals or a 5.5% reduction during open enrollment for 2026. (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services).



	Hardee	Highlands	Hillsborough	Manatee	Polk
Percent of Children Without Health Insurance	7.5	11.9	5.9	10.1	7.7
Percent of Adults Aged 18-64 Without Health Insurance	23	22	16	18	18

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Medicaid is a medical assistance program that provides access to health care for low-income families and individuals. Medicaid also assists older people and people with disabilities with the costs of nursing facility care and other medical and long-term care expenses. (Florida Agency for Health Care Administration). While single adults generally are not eligible for Medicaid in Florida, Medicaid does cover prenatal care, delivery and postpartum care for eligible women. Medicaid enrollment numbers change monthly



Source: Florida Agency for Health Care Administration *Births Covered by Medicaid, Percent of Births with a Payment Source, 2022-24.

** Quarterly Nursing Home Utilization Report, Quarter ending 12/31/2025, Health Council of West Central Florida, Inc.

Options for People Without Insurance include:

County Health Plans offer some medical services for low-income residents. Three counties in the West Central Florida region have plans available. Eligibility and coverage varies by county and can be found in the links below.

Hillsborough: Apply for the Health Care Plan | Hillsborough County, FL,

Manatee: Manatee County Resident Health Care Plan Information

Polk County: Requirements for receiving medical care for people without financial resources.

Federally Qualified Community Health Centers (FQHC) Find a Health Center – Florida Association of Community Health Centers are community-based healthcare organizations that deliver primary care and supportive services including mental health and chronic disease management to medically underserved populations, including low-income individuals, rural residents, and the uninsured. FQHCs offer income-based sliding fee scale for uninsured individuals as well as accepting some health insurance plans.

Additional services such as free clinics (Member Directory - Florida Association of Free and Charitable Clinics), WeCare Manatee and WeCare of Central Florida, street medicine programs and mobile clinics and screening services are also available to assist uninsured residents needing health care.

Health Care Providers

The availability of providers is also a critical factor in accessing care. Ratios of providers to population are a helpful way to frame access to care. The table below compares our region with both Florida and counties in the nation that ranks in the top 25% of all counties in a given health measure or overall health score.

Ratio of Population to Primary Care Physicians, Dentists, and Mental Health Providers by County, Florida, and Top Performing US Counties, and Year of Data

County	Primary Care Physicians (2021)	Dentists (2022)	Mental Health Providers (2024)
Hardee	6,356:1	1,710:1	5,152:1
Highlands	3,665:1	2,584:1	2,281:1
Hillsborough	1,791:1	2,687:1	976:1
Manatee	1,722:1	2,112:1	1,109:1
Polk	1,197:1	1,570:1	420:1
Florida	2,172:1	1,370:1	459:1
Top Performers	1,030:1	1,180:1	220:1

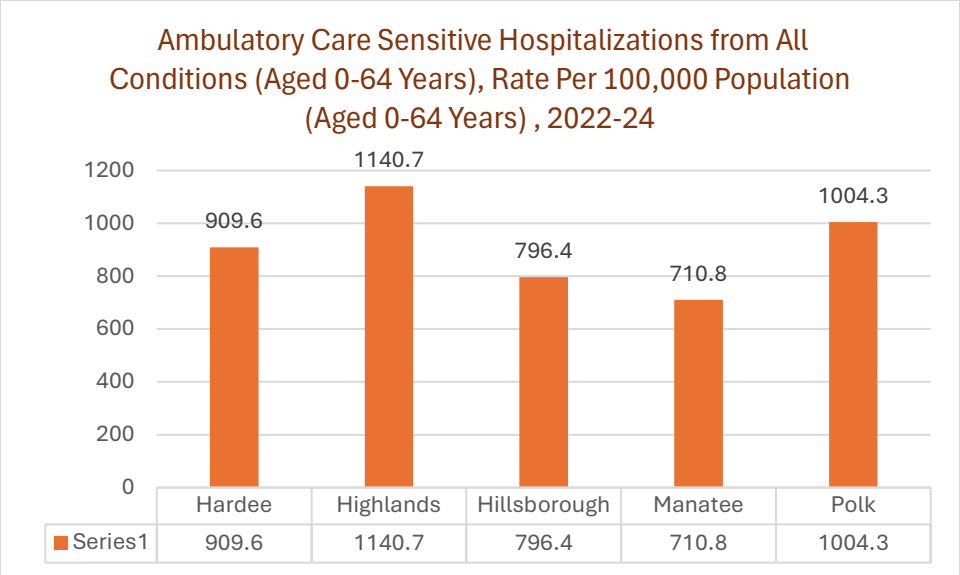
Source: County Health Rankings

Indicators for Adequate Primary Care

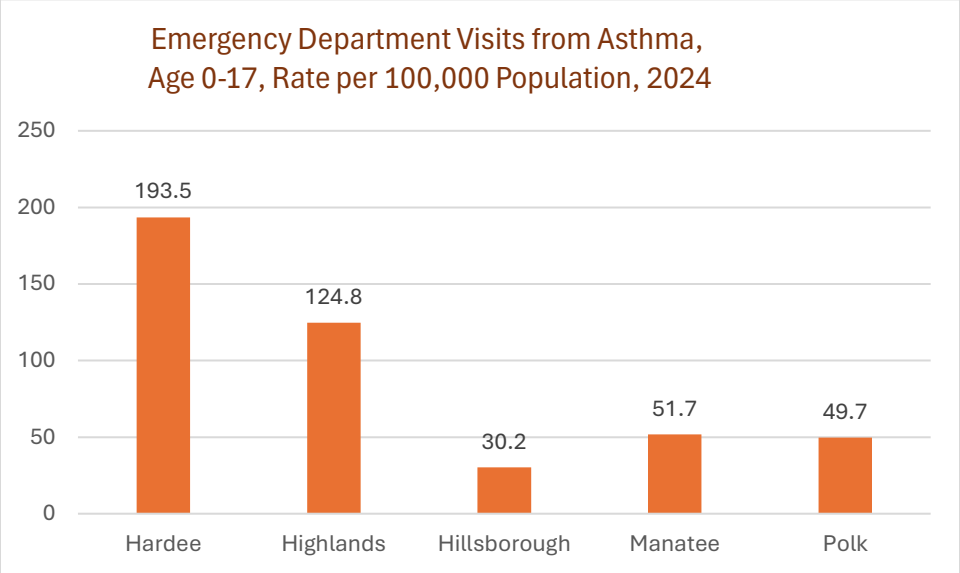
Emergency room utilization and hospitalization for ambulatory care sensitive conditions are commonly used as a population health metric because they can help identify communities where investments in primary care, prevention, and community health services may improve outcomes and reduce healthcare costs.

Analyses of Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions (ACSCs) have shown that timely, effective primary care can reduce both emergency department visits and hospital admissions for chronic conditions including diabetes, asthma, hypertension, dehydration, chronic lung disease and heart failure.

Timely and effective outpatient care can decrease hospitalization rates and emergency room visits by preventing the onset of an illness or condition, controlling an acute episode of an illness, or managing a chronic disease or condition.



Source: Florida Agency for Health Care Administration



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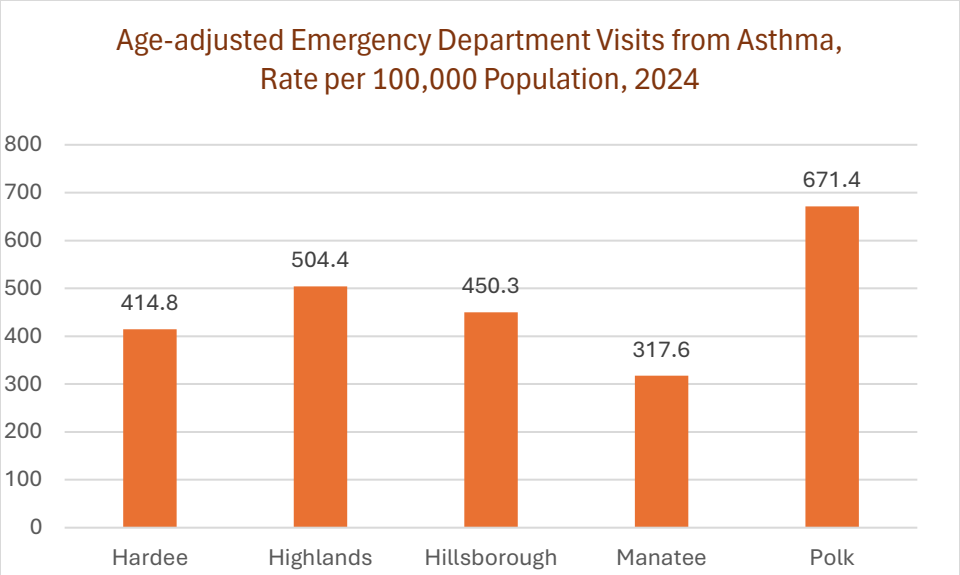

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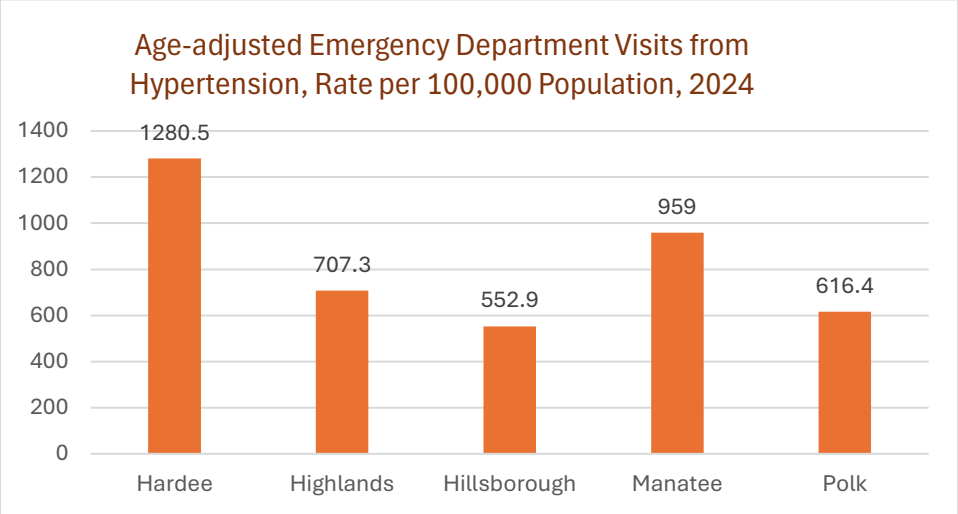

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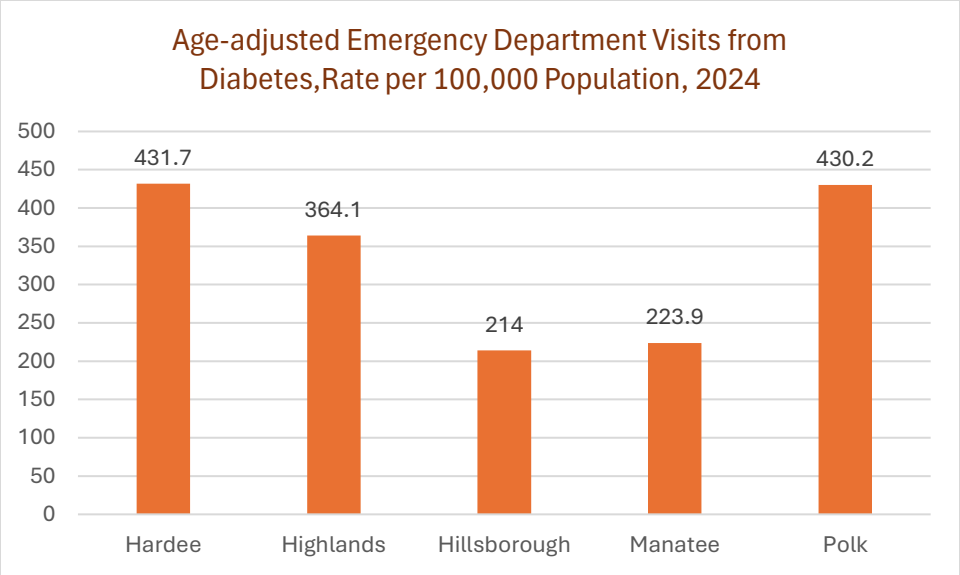

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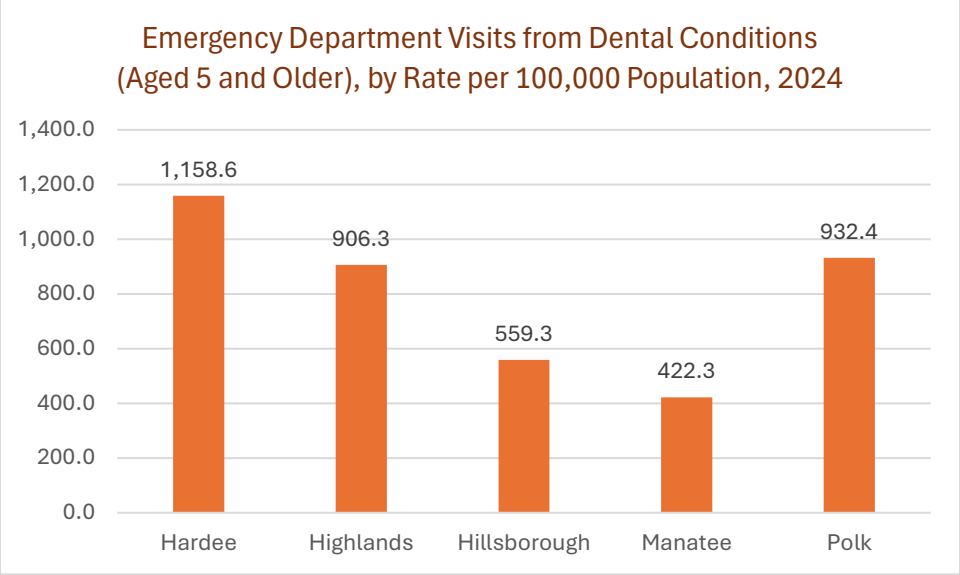

Source: Florida Agency for Health Care Administration