

A nighttime photograph of a city skyline with several illuminated skyscrapers and a fountain in the foreground. The sky is a deep purple and blue. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

100 WOMEN STRONG | CENTRAL FLORIDA FOUNDATION

Women's Health & Wellbeing
WHITE PAPER

Setting the stage for our strategic giving
circle's 2025-2027 grant cycles

100 WOMEN STRONG | CENTRAL FLORIDA
FOUNDATION

White Paper

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Table of Contents

- About 100 Women Strong 7**
- Report Goal 9**
- Our Focus: Women’s Health & Well-being 10**
- Understanding Women’s Physical and Mental Health 14**
 - Access to Healthcare..... 14
 - Mental Health..... 19
 - Maternal Health..... 22
- Recommendations and Areas to Explore 28**



Photography by Emily Wray



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WOMEN STRONG Central Florida's **STRATEGIC & FEMALE-LED** Giving Circle

About 100 Women Strong

100 Women Strong [100WS] at Central Florida Foundation is a strategic giving circle dedicated to improving the lives of women and children. As the area's only philanthropic organization built on women-only leadership, collective giving, and collaborative grantmaking, 100 Women Strong harnesses its diverse perspectives and collective power to tackle the biggest challenges affecting women and children. Since the circle's establishment, 100WS has contributed over \$950,000 in grants to local organizations that enhance women's and children's lives, keeping in mind that including the children in our mission is rooted in the understanding that supporting the next generation is essential for building a brighter future and ensuring our long-term community well-being.

100WS employs a distinctive approach to philanthropy. Members contribute annually, pooling their resources to make substantial investments in the community. Members vote on an investment priority from one of our six focus areas every three years. Through data and partnerships with community organizations working in this space, we strive to understand and address the root causes of issues within the selected focus area.

Background

During the past 3 years, 100 Women Strong focused on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) to address various economic challenges faced by women in Central Florida (representing 7-counties including Orange, Osceola, Lake, Seminole, Brevard, Volusia, and Polk). The framework aimed to support the economic independence and resiliency of women and their families, particularly those most vulnerable to economic insecurity. Our grants have targeted three key areas:

1. In 2022, we partnered with Poverty Solutions Group (PSG) to design a pilot project addressing domestic violence and increasing economic stability for survivors.
2. In 2023, we supported the Early Learning Shared Services Alliance (ELLSA) to train the childcare workforce, recognizing the critical role of affordable, quality childcare in women's economic empowerment.
3. In 2024, we funded Women On The Rise (WOTR) to help mitigate the 'Benefit Cliff' barrier, ensuring that working women do not lose essential benefits as their incomes rise.

100 Women Strong Focus Areas



Goal of This Report

This report aims to take our initial research and conversations with subject-matter experts to the next level by defining the problems and challenges in each topic area and identifying models and best practices that could be adapted for our community. Additionally, we will explore existing community programs and look for ways to pilot, scale, accelerate, or fill gaps in current programs and systems.

Furthermore, we hope this research and report will highlight opportunities for broader community focus to create a healthier Central Florida.



Note to Readers

This 100WS report serves as a foundational document informing readers about the status of women's health and well-being in Central Florida. It is not intended to provide immediate solutions but rather to lay the groundwork for understanding the challenges and opportunities within our focus areas. The insights gathered here are to guide the 100WS Research & Grants Team in developing targeted strategies and interventions in the coming phases of our work.

Our Focus: Women's Health & Well-being

In 2024, 100 Women Strong members made a significant decision: choosing Women's Health and Well-being [WHW] as the central theme for our grantmaking over the next three years. This strategic focus underscores our commitment to enhancing the health and well-being of women and their families in Central Florida. Collaborating with community experts, organizations, and the Central Florida Foundation, the 100WS Research & Grants [R&G] Team developed a comprehensive framework to guide our investments in women's health and well-being.

This strategic framework targets three critical areas: access to healthcare, mental health, and maternal health and disparities. This approach is enriched by a strong emphasis on community engagement, ensuring that our strategies are effective and reflect our community's diverse needs.



Access to Healthcare

As our Change Framework on pages 12 and 13 shows, our first pillar, Access to Healthcare, aims to ensure that every woman and child receives comprehensive and ongoing health services regardless of their economic status. We recognize the necessity of an integrated approach to healthcare — one that encompasses not just medical treatments but also socio-economic support. To enhance the reach of health services, we are identifying ways to break down barriers to access, particularly for uninsured and economically disadvantaged groups.

Mental Health

The Mental Health pillar is dedicated to improving mental health services and reducing the stigma associated with mental health care. We are committed to creating a more inclusive environment where community support, education, and accessible services are available to all. We aim to address mental health challenges comprehensively and compassionately through initiatives like peer support and community education.

Maternal Health Disparities

In addressing Maternal Health Disparities, our focus is on significantly reducing the health disparities that affect maternal outcomes, especially among women of color who face alarmingly high mortality rates during childbirth and postpartum. Our approach combines data-driven strategies with a broad community health perspective to design programs that tackle these disparities head-on. By considering medical and socio-economic factors, we're committed to creating changes that improve maternal health outcomes.

Infusing Community

This framework, with its focus on Access to Healthcare, Maternity Disparities, and Mental Health, and underscored by a community-centric approach, sets a clear path forward for improving healthcare in Central Florida. By integrating strategic health initiatives with the power of community engagement, we are dedicated to substantially improving the health and well-being of women and their families in our region. This comprehensive and collaborative approach allows us to address immediate health needs while establishing the foundation for long-term, sustainable change.

Current Health Outlook

Every three years, a comprehensive community health assessment is conducted to evaluate the community's health and identify priority focus areas for healthcare providers and community leaders. The 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment [CHNA]¹ identified health-related issues and focused on the social determinants of health. In this report, they identified the top challenges and barriers at three levels, policy, advocacy, and system; community; and individual.

Below is a snapshot of the challenges identified in the CHNA.

Policy, Advocacy, and System Level

This includes areas where policy and regulatory changes may be required to improve current conditions and impact. Common areas identified through qualitative data include:

- Complex health care system including staff shortages
- Financial issues including the fact that many have no real access to health insurance without Medicaid expansion
- Nonprofit organization funding and sustainability challenges
- Workforce development and staffing challenges

100 WOMEN STRONG | CENTRAL FLORIDA FOUNDATION CHANGE FRAMEWORK

WOMEN'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING (WHW)

Attainment of holistic health and ensuring well-being for women and children in Central Florida

ACCESSIBLE & COMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE



MENTAL HEALTH FOR WOMEN & FAMILIES



MATERNAL HEALTH EDUCATION & PREVENTATIVE CARE



Community Level

Community-level changes often affect the general population and not just select individuals. The community challenges include:

- Rapid population growth
- Shortage of Behavioral Health Options
- Health care access is not equitable across the region
- Lack of awareness of available community services

Individual Level

Many of the identified challenges make it down to the community residents. Some of the challenges include:

- Affordable Housing
- Chronic Disease
- Wage Gap
- Access to care

Mental health and access to healthcare were recurrent themes in the 2022 CHNA. The need for information sharing and co-locations were also listed in the top 15 priority needs. Housing, childcare, and a culturally competent workforce made an appearance as well with housing topping the list.

Understanding Women's Physical and Mental Health Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare is a critical issue affecting women and children in Central Florida. Despite advancements in medical technology and healthcare policy, significant barriers persist preventing or limiting access, including workforce shortages, cultural and language barriers, and logistical and financial constraints. These challenges may lead to disengagement from the healthcare system, which in turn, can exacerbate health disparities that are experienced by women and children.

When we look at the [2023 America's Health Rankings presented by the United Health Foundation](#), Florida ranks low, in comparison with other states, at 44 and 47 for women and children's clinical care, respectively [a rank of 50 corresponds to the least healthy value].² The clinical care category represents access to quality health care and preventive services, such as primary care providers, immunizations, and preventable hospitalizations.

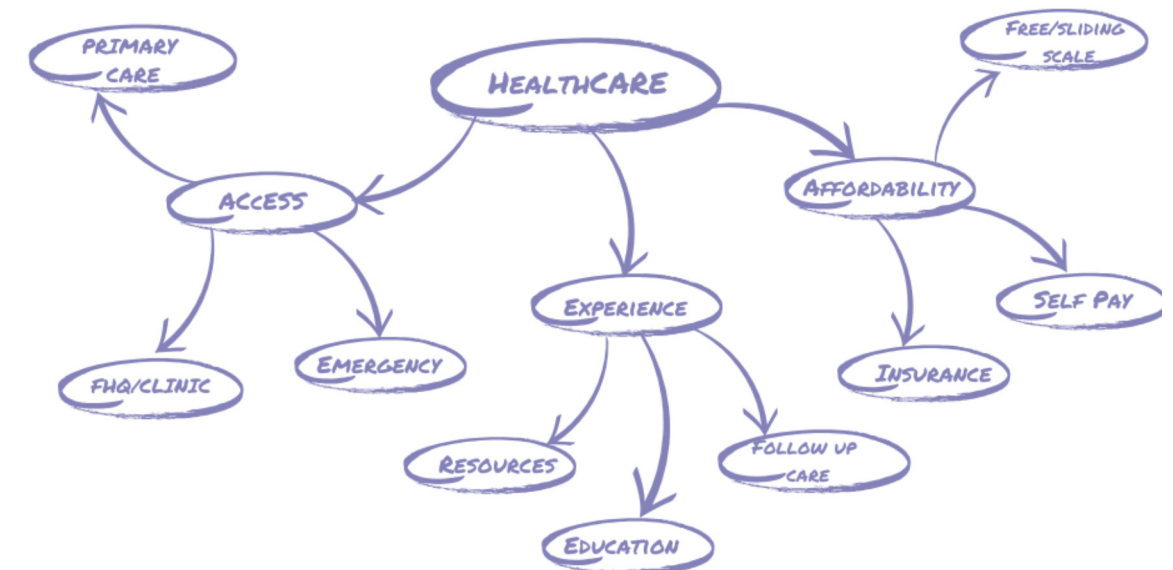
According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [formerly known as the Institute of Medicine], access to healthcare is defined as the timely use of personal health services to achieve the best health outcomes.³ Some important components to access include:

Measures

Women		U.S. Value	Children		U.S. Value
Social & Economic Factors*					
Community and Family Safety	Firearm Deaths†	5.6	Community and Family Safety	Child Victimization†	8.1
	Injury Deaths	48.1		Firearm Deaths†	5.3
	Intimate Partner Violence Before Pregnancy†	2.6%		Injury Deaths	17.4
Economic Resources	Concentrated Disadvantage	25.9%	Economic Resources	Children in Poverty	16.9%
	Food Insecurity	10.4%		Children in Poverty Racial Disparity	3.0
	Gender Pay Gap†	81.5%		High-Speed Internet	95.3%
	Poverty	15.5%		Students Experiencing Homelessness	2.2%
	Unemployment	5.2%		WIC Coverage	48.3%
Education	College Graduate	36.8%	Education	Early Childhood Education	40.2%
				Fourth Grade Reading Proficiency	32.1%
				High School Completion	89.4%
Social Support and Engagement	Infant Child Care Cost†	11.7%	Social Support and Engagement	Adverse Childhood Experiences	14.0%
	Residential Segregation - Black/White	—		Foster Care Instability	15.2%
	Voter Participation	60.7%		Neighborhood Amenities	35.5%
		Reading, Singing or Storytelling		57.2%	
Physical Environment*					
Air and Water Quality	Air Pollution	7.8			
	Drinking Water Violations	0.8%			
	Household Smoke	13.8%			
	Water Fluoridation	72.7%			
Climate and Health	Climate Change Policies	—			
	Transportation Energy Use†	8.2			
Housing and Transportation	Drive Alone to Work	66.0%			
	Housing Cost Burden (households with children)†	31.2%			
	Housing With Lead Risk	16.9%			
	Severe Housing Problems	17.0%			

2023 Health of Women and Children Report AmericasHealthRankings.org

[Source](#)



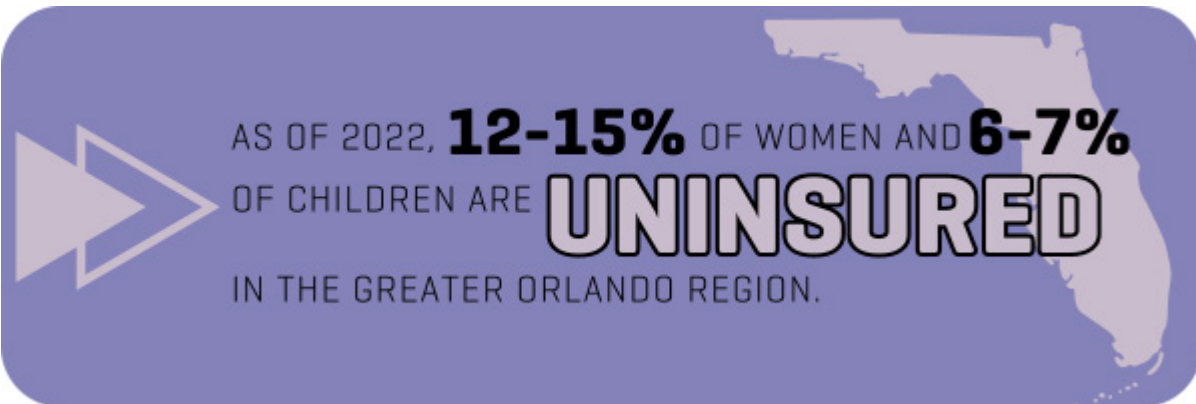
Patient Questions:

- Can I get care when I need it?
- Can I afford the care I need?
- Will I understand my diagnosis, next steps, and questions to ask?

Coverage

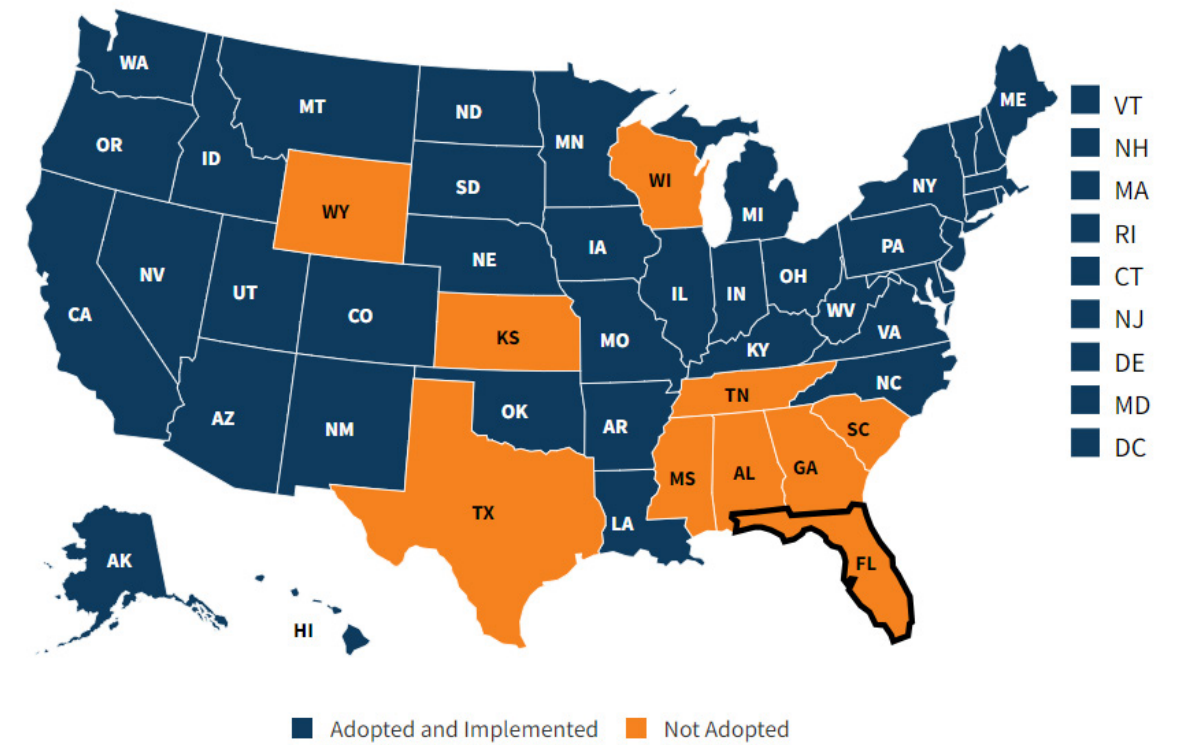
Health insurance opens the door to the healthcare system. Compared with insured women and children, uninsured women and children experience more health disadvantages, including unmet care needs such as well-child visits, lower use of recommended and preventive services such as mammograms and pap tests for cancer screening, and poorer health outcomes.

Since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, the rates of uninsured women of reproductive age have declined. This decline is due in part to the growing share of adult women enrolled in Medicaid. States with Medicaid expansion have played a pivotal role in reducing the uninsured population. Medicaid expansion improves the health of women and children, especially for low-income and minority communities.⁴ Medicaid covers the poorest population of women: 43% of women with income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and 52% of women with income below 100% FPL.⁴ Women on Medicaid, for example, use preventive health services, such as mammograms and pap smears, at rates comparable to women with private insurance and at higher rates than women without coverage, and they are less likely to experience cost barriers.⁴ Yet, [12-15% of women and 6-7% of children in the Orlando metropolitan area were still uninsured in 2022](#) and as of [June 2024, Florida is one of 10 states that has not expanded Medicaid](#).^{5,6,7}



Availability of Timely Services

A reliable source of care and the ability to receive care when the need is recognized is associated with successful health outcomes, including recommended preventive and screening services and improvements in managing chronic conditions.² A regular source of care can help with care coordination and continuity which is particularly important for women who often rely on multiple providers for routine care [e.g., primary care providers for general health care and obstetricians or gynecologists for reproductive care]. [In 2022, nearly 1 in 5 women in Florida did not have a personal doctor and did not have a medical checkup in the past year.](#)⁷



Source

Workforce

Ensuring high-quality health outcomes requires a supportive health system infrastructure. This infrastructure involves a capable, qualified, and culturally competent workforce. Women and children from diverse cultural backgrounds face additional challenges in accessing and navigating the healthcare system. Research demonstrates that diversity in the workforce, including race, ethnicity, and gender, is important.⁹ If health services come from someone women can relate to, they are more likely to be open and receptive to it. When women see themselves in their healthcare providers, it fosters trust and comfort, making it easier to discuss their needs and concerns. Similarly, if policies and programming are developed by people who understand women's lived experiences, those policies and programs will resonate more deeply and be more effective. These empathetic connections ensure women feel seen, heard, and valued, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and stronger communities.

One of the ongoing challenges, as noted in the CHNA, is the workforce shortage in healthcare. According to the Florida Hospital Association's 2021 analysis, the state faces an overall shortage of 59,000 nurses by 2035.⁹ They are looking at ways to use technology to lessen administrative burdens.

Gender Bias

Research shows¹⁰ that women are often overlooked or ignored in their quest for a proper diagnosis. This oversight can stem from long-standing biases and misconceptions within the

medical community, where women’s symptoms are sometimes dismissed as exaggerated or misattributed to psychological factors. Such biases can lead to significant delays in diagnosis and treatment, particularly for conditions that predominantly affect women, such as autoimmune diseases, endometriosis, and certain heart conditions.

The lack of attention to women’s specific health needs not only exacerbates their health issues but also undermines their trust in the healthcare system. When women feel overlooked or misunderstood, it deepens their frustration and fear, making it harder for them to seek the care they need. Women of color, in particular, face even greater hurdles due to systemic racism and discrimination, further complicating their healthcare journey. These additional barriers can leave them feeling isolated and marginalized, highlighting the urgent need for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to healthcare that genuinely understands and addresses their unique experiences and challenges. Addressing these disparities requires a concerted effort to educate healthcare providers about the unique health challenges women face, foster empathy, and ensure that women’s voices are heard and valued in the diagnostic process. Only then can we move towards a truly equitable healthcare system that meets the needs of all women, ensuring they receive timely and accurate diagnoses and the compassionate care they deserve.

Increasing Access

The CHNA¹ outlined several components of access to healthcare aligned with the prioritized needs identified for Lake, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties. Related top needs and associated granular issues identified in the assessment include the following needs:

Increased system capacity

- Dental care for children, especially those from low-income or other priority communities
- Recruitment and retention of culturally diverse and informed providers who demographically reflect the community
- Training for providers caring for members of priority communities
- Childcare services, especially for children with special needs
- Access to free or low-cost health care services for all residents

Streamlined access to care

- Access to free or low-cost health care services for all residents
- Access to primary care services
- Mental health crisis services and community awareness of available resources
- Case managers, community health workers, and similarly licensed professionals supporting patients with complex needs

Disengagement

Disengagement from the healthcare system is a significant consequence of some of the challenges outlined above. When women perceive healthcare as inaccessible, unaffordable, or not culturally congruent, they are less likely to seek preventive care, adhere to treatment plans,

or maintain regular visits for themselves and their children. This leads to missed opportunities for early intervention and worsens health outcomes, impacting the well-being of entire families. This disengagement leads to poorer health outcomes, higher incidences of chronic and adverse conditions, and increased healthcare costs in the long run.

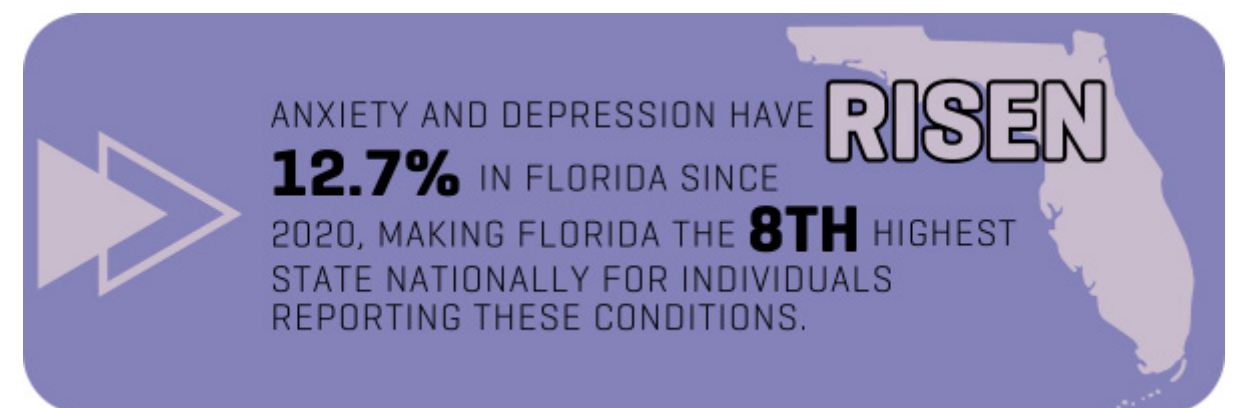
Contributing Factors:

- **Mistrust and Fear:** Financial constraints and prior negative experiences can foster mistrust and fear of the healthcare system.
- **Complexity and Confusion:** Navigating insurance, scheduling appointments, and understanding medical advice can be overwhelming, particularly for those with limited health literacy and resources.
- **Perceived Inefficacy:** Women who experience long wait times or receive inadequate care may perceive the healthcare system as ineffective, further reducing their engagement.

Mental Health

As part of our grant strategy, 100 Women Strong takes time to meet with subject-matter experts in our chosen focus area. During the Meet the Experts Panel in April 2024, Brittany Brown from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Greater Orlando, indicated mental health challenges worsened in the local area post-COVID-19 and emphasized the importance of destigmatizing mental health care.

Research finds that reports of anxiety and depression have risen 12.7% in Florida since April 2020¹¹, making Florida the 8th highest nationally for the average rate of individuals reporting these.



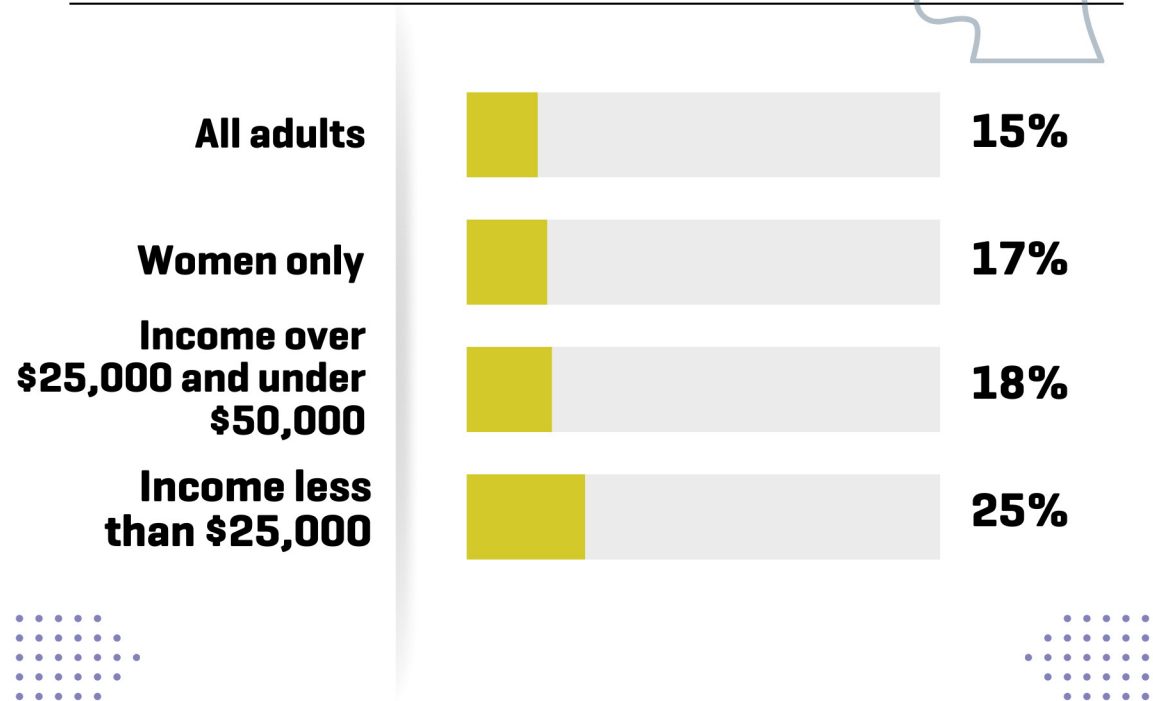
The words mental health and mental illness are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same. NAMI Greater Orlando defines mental illness as “a medical condition that disrupts a person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental illnesses are medical conditions that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life. Mental illnesses can affect people of any age, race, religion, or income. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing. Mental illnesses are treatable.”¹² Data indicates that one in five adults in the United States experience mental illness.¹³

Mental health, on the other hand, describes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being according to the Centers for Disease Control [CDC]. In Florida, 15% of adults reported poor mental health on 14 or more of the past 30 days, with this percentage higher for women [17%] and those with an annual income below \$50,000 [25% for those making less than \$25,000 and 18% for those making more than \$25,000 but less than \$50,000].

The Mental Health Association of Central Florida [MHACF] reported that, in 2022, rates of suicidal ideation have risen to the highest among young people Overall, adolescents in the 11-to-17 year age range reported frequent suicidal ideation on more than half or nearly every day of the

MENTAL HEALTH IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

According to the CDC, people reporting poor mental health 14 or more of the past 30 days



previous two weeks. That number rose to 52% for young people of color and 63% for youth who identified as LGBTQ+. This data indicates that mental health issues appear more prevalent in traditionally underserved populations, such as women and socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals.

This information plays out when we dive deeper into the data and discover that children growing up in socioeconomic disadvantage are 2-3 times more likely to experience mental health problems than their non disadvantaged peers.¹⁴

Stigma

Despite the prevalence of mental illness, and knowledge shared by experts that the condition is treatable, there are factors nationally and within the local community that impede individuals from seeking help. Information from the field indicates that stigma and access, specifically cost and availability of services, are significant factors.

A [2024 Landscape report](#) from the Central Florida Foundation indicates there is a community-wide stigma surrounding seeking mental health issues which may discourage individuals from seeking treatment.¹⁵ A 2023 study conducted in the Tampa Bay Region emphasized the importance of addressing community perceptions of mental health and stigma, which are often misinterpretations passed down generationally.¹⁶ Social media is both a tool and an obstacle in the campaign to end the stigma surrounding seeking behavioral and mental health services. While social media can enhance mental health by creating social connections and peer support, research also indicates excessive use of social media can result in loneliness, feelings of missing out, and dissatisfaction with one’s life.¹⁷ In a recent communication to the New York Times [June 17, 2024], the surgeon general has stated he would like to add a warning label to social media as it pertains to mental health.¹⁸

Access and Affordability

In 2021, 41% of adult Floridians reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, but 25% of those were unable to receive mental health services with half of these individuals citing cost as the prohibiting factor¹⁹ The state estimates that 415,000 Floridians are in a coverage gap because they do not have health insurance through their job, but they earn too much to qualify for Medicaid²⁰. The United Way’s ALICE [Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed] Report reveals a sobering reality for many hardworking individuals in Central Florida. Despite being employed, a significant portion of these workers are paid by the hour, often facing unpredictable fluctuations in their income.²¹ This instability is compounded by the Benefits Cliff issue, where even a slight increase in earnings can lead to a sudden loss of essential benefits, plunging families into financial uncertainty. These are not just statistics; they represent the everyday struggles of our neighbors, friends, and community members striving to make ends meet in an economy that doesn’t always reward their efforts.

To complicate matters, many behavioral health providers do not accept Medicare and Medicaid. Additionally, there are very few providers (psychiatrists) able to prescribe medications to these enrollees. This leaves people to look for free and low-cost resources. According to our local NAMI chapter they have a list of resources on their site varying in cost from free to \$250 per session. They also refer people to online sites such as Psychiatry Today, Regain, Pride Counseling, TalkSpace, GrowTherapy, and faith providers such as Faith Assembly and Grace Counseling. Central Florida Cares, 2-1-1, and Findhelp.org also have lists of services. That part is good, getting appointments can be another challenge altogether.

Availability

The availability of services along a continuum of care is another obstacle for many individuals. Florida ranks 6th in the nation for the most Health Professional Shortage Areas, a federal designation identifying areas and populations experiencing shortages of healthcare professionals.²² Lack of healthcare professionals impacts continuity of care, with many people in who in are crisis unable to transition their care as their needs change, possibly escalating but not entirely resolving their health concerns. In Orange County, it is difficult for agencies to share information which may result in additional barriers for individuals who seek out assistance with mental health. The CHNA indicates a shortage of healthcare providers in the local community.

Impact of Untreated Mental Illness

Untreated, various mental illnesses can lead to reduced productivity, job loss, and economic insecurity for many individual Floridians. To the state, these outcomes can potentially spill over and require more public expenditures to address substance abuse, incarceration, and health care in the future. Since mental illness may not surface right away, quantifying these long-term costs is difficult at present.

Disparities in Maternal Healthcare

Maternal healthcare in Central Florida reflects significant disparities influenced by ethnic and socioeconomic factors. In exploring these disparities, we are focusing on mental health stigmas and ethnic differences in healthcare access and outcomes. Addressing these disparities is critical for improving maternal health and ensuring equitable healthcare for all mothers within Central Florida.

Maternal healthcare is a critical component of public health, vital for the well-being of mothers and their children. However, in Central Florida, disparities in maternal healthcare access and outcomes are prominent, particularly among minority and low-income populations. These disparities manifest in various dimensions, including prenatal care quality, maternal mortality rates, and mental health support.

Ethnic and Racial Disparities

Ethnic disparities in maternal healthcare are stark in Central Florida. Black women are more likely to experience adverse maternal health outcomes than their white counterparts. This disparity reflects deeper systemic issues that need urgent attention, impacting the health of Black women and the well-being of their families. Addressing these inequalities is crucial for creating a healthcare system that truly supports all mothers. For example, Black women face higher rates of maternal mortality and are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care.¹

Maternal Mortality

Hypertension

Black women in Florida have maternal mortality rates significantly higher than those of white women. This disparity is linked to systemic factors such as socioeconomic status, access to healthcare, and underlying health conditions like hypertension and diabetes. Hypertension is the leading cause of maternal mortality, with a disproportionate impact on Black women in the United States and Central Florida. Many women with hypertension do not receive adequate monitoring during pregnancy due to limited access to healthcare services. There is often a lack of continuity in care, with insufficient follow-up postpartum to manage hypertension, increasing the risk of complications. Non-Hispanic Black women are almost **four times** as likely to have a pregnancy-related death compared with non-Hispanic White women in 2020 in Florida.¹

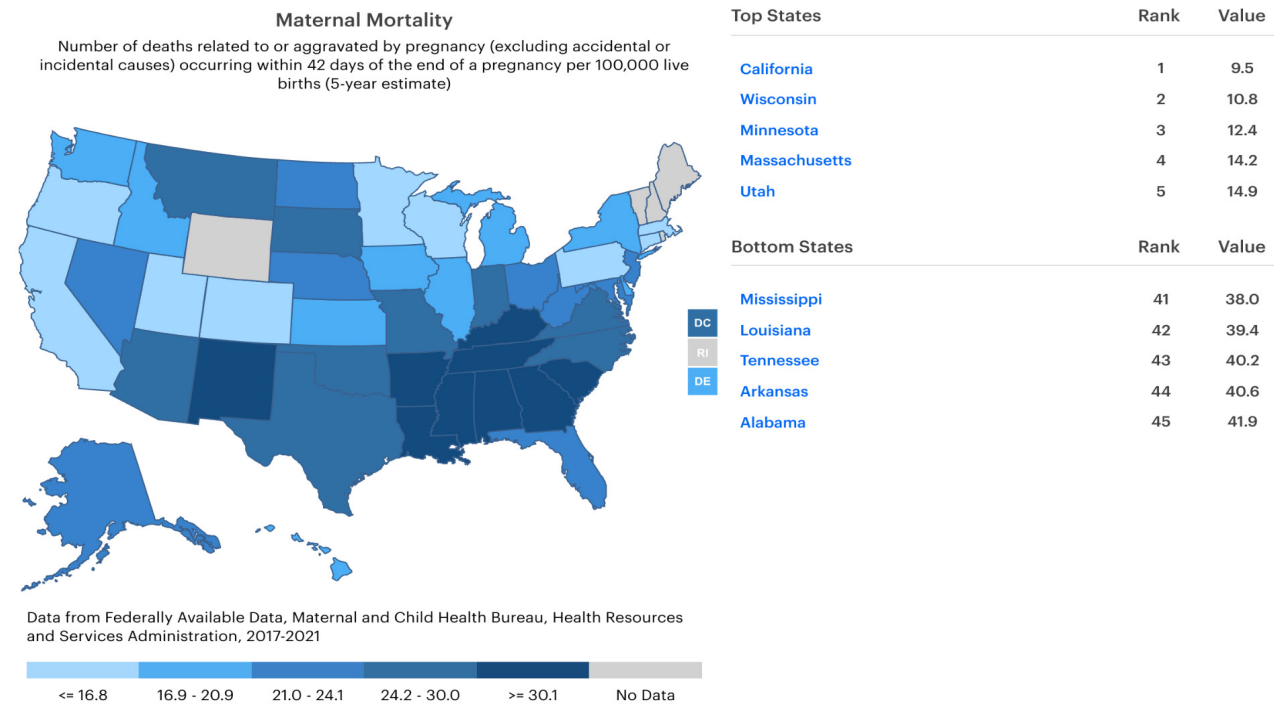
CENTRAL FLORIDA MATERNAL MORTALITY BY COUNTY, 2002

Maternal Mortality Rates per 100,000 live births in 2022 by Central Florida County Florida Average: 15.2

COUNTY	ALL	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC
ORANGE	6.0	22.4	0.0	0.0
SEMINOLE	21.3	0.0	30.0	79.1
OSCEOLA	20.1	161.3	0.0	0.0
VOLUSIA	19.8	0.0	26.2	0.0
LAKE	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
POLK	22.0	55.7	0.0	29.8

Maternal Mortality by State

Number of deaths related to or aggravated by pregnancy (excluding accidental or incidental causes) occurring within 42 days of the end of a pregnancy per 100,000 live births (5-year estimate)



Prenatal Care

Hispanic and African American women are less likely to receive early and consistent prenatal care compared to other populations of women. Factors contributing to this include language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of health insurance coverage in predominantly minority communities.²⁴

The preterm birth rate among babies born to Black women is 1.6x higher than the rate among all other babies at 14.9 per 1,000 babies. The infant mortality rate among babies born to black women is 1.8x higher than the rate among all other babies at 10.7 per 1,000 babies.

On a more positive note, there are several programs focused on maternal health including Healthy Start through the Florida Health Department which houses the Bellies, Babies, and Beyond Initiative focused on serving women from pregnancy through the baby's second birthday. Orlando Health is working with patients to receive hypertension education and baby-safe sleeping education as part of their services. There is also a mass media messaging partnership with the LYNX bus system focused on Prenatal care access, Safe Sleeping, and Drowning prevention.

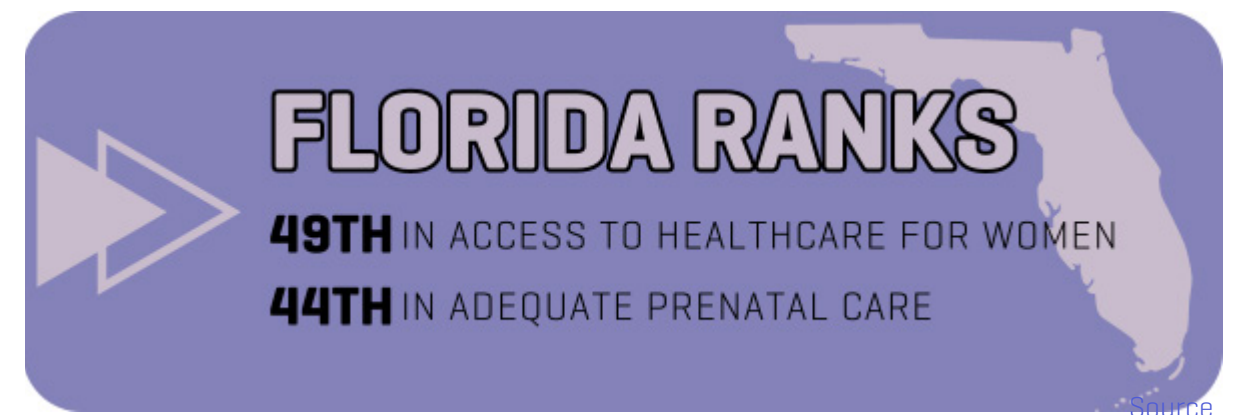
Postnatal Care

When we consider the timing of maternal deaths, we find that 77.3% of maternal pregnancy-related deaths in Florida occurred post-partum after a live birth. The Florida Department of health determined that 68.2% of the pregnancy-related deaths were preventable. Of these deaths 30 had a range of 50-71.4% chance of being preventable (an additional 7 were described as unknown as to the timing). Those who died during pregnancy were determined to be 100% preventable.

There are existing post-partum resources and support, but they can be difficult to find or may not be conducive to a new mom's schedule. Postpartum mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) "baby blues" affect 1 in 7 mothers, 1 in 3 for black mothers according to the Central Florida Postpartum Alliance.

Socioeconomic Disparities

Poverty and lack of insurance are significant barriers to accessing maternal healthcare. In Florida, 20% of women of childbearing age are uninsured, and in areas like Orlando, the lack of health insurance is linked to higher rates of maternal mortality (CDC). Another contributing factor may be that women in Florida without minor children are NOT eligible for Medicaid, no matter how low their income is. This significantly restricts the pre-and post-natal care available to them.



Mental Health and Stigma

Mental Health during and after pregnancy is a critical component of maternal healthcare. Stigmas surrounding mental health issues can prevent women from seeing or receiving appropriate care.

Mental health conditions such as postpartum depression are underdiagnosed in Central Florida, partly due to cultural stigma and lack of awareness among healthcare providers and patients. Ethnic minorities and non-English speakers are particularly vulnerable to underdiagnosis and lack of treatment. Language barriers and cultural differences can hinder effective communication of

symptoms and concerns. Additionally, stigma and discrimination can erode the trust necessary for open dialogue between patients and healthcare providers, crucial for accurate diagnosis and effective treatment. Highlighting these issues is essential to advocate for a more inclusive healthcare environment that ensures quality care for everyone.

[A 2011 study published in Psychiatry Online](#)²⁵ discusses the racial and ethnic disparities in postpartum depression care among low-income women. Some of the findings included:

- Black and Latina women were less likely than their white counterparts to initiate mental health care after delivery [white women having approx. twice the odds of starting treatment].
- Black and Latina women who started treatment had a lower chance of receiving follow-up or continued care compared to their white counterparts.
- Minority women frequently encounter stereotypes and biases in healthcare that can lead to misdiagnosis, inadequate treatment, and a general lack of empathy and understanding from healthcare providers.
- Specific barriers to postpartum care with low-income and minority women include not only stigma, but also communication disparities with medical staff and logistic issues [including insurance coverage, time off from work, childcare, and transportation]
- The CDC reports that up to 20% of pregnant women in the U.S. experience a mental health disorder, yet less than half receive treatment.

The CDC reports that up to 20% of pregnant women in the U.S. experience a mental health disorder, yet less than half receive treatment.



Infant Mortality Rates

The infant mortality rate in Florida stands at 6.0 per 1,000 live births, higher than the national average, with marked disparities among ethnic groups. For instance, the infant mortality rate among Black women in Orlando is nearly double that of white women.

Another barrier is the lack of trust in the healthcare system among Black women which significantly impacts their maternal health outcomes. This mistrust is deeply rooted in systemic racism and historical inequities in medical care, as evidenced by studies highlighting discriminatory practices and implicit biases that Black women face during pregnancy

CENTRAL FLORIDA INFANT MORTALITY BY COUNTY, 2002

Infant Mortality Rates per 1,000 live births in 2022 by Central Florida County
Florida Average: 6.0

COUNTY	ALL	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC
ORANGE	5.7	10.1	4.1	4.6
SEMINOLE	5.1	10.0	3.9	2.4
OSCEOLA	4.0	12.9	2.3	3.9
VOLUSIA	5.7	12.5	4.2	5.5
LAKE	4.5	7.1	4.5	3.2
POLK	8.1	18.4	5.4	7.5

and childbirth [Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2023²⁶]. Community engagement is essential in addressing these disparities; for instance, initiatives like the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act propose comprehensive reforms to improve maternal health outcomes by fostering trust through culturally sensitive care [De Beaumont Foundation, 2022²⁷]. Furthermore, programs such as Merck for Mothers emphasize building trust through empathetic and personalized care, which has shown promise in enhancing the maternal health experiences of Black women [Commonwealth Fund, 2023²⁸]. The success of community-led health programs in Rhode Island also underscores the importance of authentic, grassroots initiatives in providing trusted maternal care [Johnson & Wales University, 2022²⁹]. These findings highlight the critical need for systemic changes and community-driven approaches to

rebuild trust and improve health outcomes for Black mothers.

The disparities in maternal healthcare in Central Florida are complex and multifaceted, requiring a comprehensive approach that addresses ethnic, socioeconomic, and mental health issues. Implementing policies that improve access to prenatal care, cultural competency training, mental health programs, and additional research with supporting data can lead to significant improvements in maternal health outcomes and reduce the healthcare disparities currently experienced by many women in Central Florida.

Recommendations and Areas to Explore

To address the multifaceted challenges in women's healthcare and well-being, we propose exploring the following potential avenues for our next grants over the next three years. These suggested initiatives align intimately with the 100 Women Strong mission to enhance the lives of women and children in Central Florida:

- Improve access to primary care: Mobile clinics, telehealth, Community Health Workers (CHWs)
- Increase cultural competency among health providers
- Training for health providers to increase listening skills to improve patient care
- Increase awareness of community resources to diagnose and treat mental illness
- Increase connection opportunities for people seeking mental health services (peer support)
- Telehealth technology supports
- Provide blood pressure and other monitoring devices to high-risk populations
- Set up early warning detection systems for maternal mortality (e.g., AIM – Patient Safety Bundles)
- Explore options such as doulas for pregnant women
- Increase and lengthen post-partum care
- Provide more help to individuals accessing services within the local mental health system

This list is non-exhaustive, representing just some of the potential strategies to enhance healthcare outcomes for women in Central Florida. Exploring these areas will enable us to make a significant impact, reinforcing our commitment to fostering a healthier and more resilient community.

Conclusion

The Next Phase for Women's Health and Well-being and 100 Women Strong

Women's Health and Well-being in Central Florida are not just imperative but urgent issues that demand immediate attention. The overall health and prosperity of women and children in the region is a priority focus area at the heart of 100 Women Strong's mission. This report outlined why this issue is crucial and the major causes of the gaps, emphasizing the pressing need for action now, not later:

- Significant barriers prevent or limit access to healthcare for women and children, including workforce shortages, cultural and language barriers, and logistical and financial constraints.
- Women of color face disproportionately high risks during childbirth and postpartum due to systemic factors and lack of consistent care.
- Mental health challenges are exacerbated by stigma and inadequate access to services, particularly for underserved populations.

In doing our research, it was challenging to gain a full understanding of the status of the health and well-being of the women and children in Central Florida due to inadequate and fragmented data. High-quality data is essential for providing a clear picture of women's health and identifying and addressing prevalent issues through targeted community health initiatives. Understanding health disparities among sub-groups based on race, ethnicity, income, and age is crucial to ensuring efficient and equitable resource allocation. This report's references indicate that key data sources include Florida Health Charts, the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute's County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, and the City Health Dashboard. However, they often lack up-to-date, localized, or disaggregated information. Comprehensive data is needed to address the complex root causes of health disparities, such as structural racism, social determinants of health, and lack of supportive policies. Addressing these requires policy changes, community engagement, and targeted interventions. While 100WS may not directly influence policy, it can support community-facing and practice-based solutions using available data to invest in the health and well-being of women and children in Central Florida.

100 Women Strong recognizes the importance of comprehensive health and well-being for women and its ripple effect on many critical issues such as housing, mental health, safety, and child well-being. This belief drove us to create a strategic framework for understanding and addressing these health disparities, to focus three years of grantmaking on women's health, and to produce this report to educate ourselves and others on the issue.

Armed with this framework, research, lessons from over 18 years of grantmaking, and relationships with community organizations, our goal is to engage the broader community in these efforts to improve women's health and well-being. We are committed to this cause and believe that the community's involvement is not just important but crucial to our success.

Over the next three years, 100WS will:

- Hone and improve our framework for understanding and addressing women's health and well-being.
- Develop and award grants to innovative health and well-being initiatives for women and children.
- Seek partner donors to expand selected pilots to improve women's health and well-being and reduce disparities, a similar process to our previous grants under the Women's Economic Empowerment focus.
- Continue to share research on women's health and create conversations with other funders and the community through the 100WS Summits we offer annually, as well as other methods.
- Work with community partners to identify new projects to address women's health and well-being issues and develop data and metric systems to measure impact.



@Judy Watson Tracy

As we embark on this three-year journey, we must recognize the transformative power of collective effort. The strategic framework developed by 100 Women Strong, addressing Access to Healthcare, Mental Health, and Maternal Health Disparities, is more than just a plan; it is a call to action. Our mission supports innovative initiatives that address these critical areas. Our strategic grantmaking is vital in empowering organizations or projects that dismantle barriers to equitable opportunities, a crucial step in ensuring everyone receives and engages with the care they need. By fostering partnerships with healthcare providers, policymakers, local organizations, and women with lived experiences, our grants enable the development and implementation of impactful strategies that shape the future of our community.

The road ahead is challenging, but it is also filled with opportunities for growth and positive change. By supporting organizations that leverage collective resources and expertise, we can build a healthier, more equitable future for all women and children in our community. Your role in this journey is not just important; it is essential and integral to our success. Your support and commitment are what will drive us forward. Let us move forward with determination,

compassion, and an unwavering commitment to making a difference.

Paraphrasing Margaret Mead's words, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed women can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has," let us be that group, driving change and inspiring hope for future generations.

For more information on 100 Women Strong, please visit <https://cffound.org/100womenstrong>.

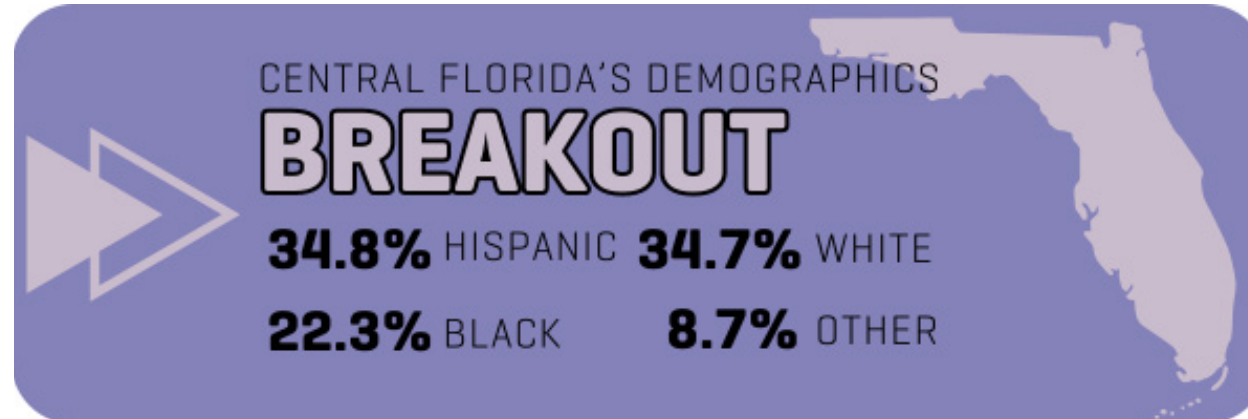
100 Women Strong is an initiative of Central Florida Foundation.

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As our region's community foundation, Central Florida Foundation serves as a launchpad for high-impact philanthropy. Championing the collective power of head, heart and dollar, we coordinate the commitment and investment of philanthropists, nonprofits, and community partners to target today's most critical challenges and those on the horizon to truly transform our community. The Foundation also offers expert giving advice, a personalized approach to managing charitable funds, and the capacity to convene collaboration across sectors. Click here to learn more at cffound.org.

Local Data



Source: 2020 Census

Health Resources

Click buttons below to access.

ORANGE COUNTY	SEMINOLE COUNTY	OSCEOLA COUNTY
LAKE COUNTY	FL GOV - ORANGE	HEALTH EQUITY

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