



Building Stronger Communities for All



Community Commitment Report – Bemidji Region

SANFORD[®]
HEALTH



Karla Eischens, president and CEO of Sanford Health Bemidji, speaks during a Women United Impact Breakfast on Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024, at BSU's Beaux Arts Ballroom. Madelyn Haasken / Bemidji Pioneer

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A Letter from Karla Eischens,
Sanford Health Bemidji President & CEO



As a nonprofit hospital, we at Sanford Health in Bemidji recognize our profound responsibility to benefit the communities we serve, ensuring that equitable and accessible health care remains at the forefront of what we do.

Spanning seven counties in northern Minnesota, our service area is uniquely diverse, with over 20% of our patients identifying as Native American. We honor and respect the rich cultural heritage of these communities, and we are dedicated to providing culturally competent care that meets patient-specific health needs.

Approximately 16% of our community members in Beltrami County alone live below the poverty line. We understand the profound challenges this presents and have implemented various programs to ensure financial barriers do not impede access to necessary medical services.

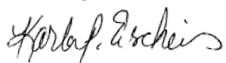
We also acknowledge the aging population within our region, which constitutes over 25% of residents within several counties that we serve. Over the next five years, this demographic is expected to increase by 20%. This shift requires us to adapt our services to better cater to the complex health issues faced by our senior residents.

To address diverse needs, we have forged strong partnerships with local non-profit organizations, educational institutions, law enforcement, tribal leaders and community officials, working collaboratively to amplify our impact. These partnerships have been instrumental in extending our reach and providing comprehensive care that addresses both medical and social determinants of health. Our community outreach and giving initiatives, such as our stable housing program, in-school child and adolescent therapy offerings and community education opportunities, have been designed to empower our residents with the knowledge and resources they need to lead healthier lives.

Through these efforts and more, we strive to create a healthier community for generations to come. As caregivers and residents of the rural communities we serve, we remain dedicated to improving health outcomes and quality of life for our patients, families and beyond. The following report not only details our current initiatives but also serves as a testament to our unwavering commitment to those we are privileged to serve.

None of this would be possible without our more than 250 community collaborators and over 2,200 employees partnering to care for our community. Together, we will continue to build a healthier, more equitable future for everyone who chooses to call northern Minnesota home.

With gratitude,



Karla Eischens, RPh
President and CEO
Sanford Health, Bemidji Region

OUR COMMITMENT

As the nation's largest nonprofit rural health care system, Sanford Health is committed to improving the health and well-being of those we serve. Our organization serves more than 1.4 million patients and nearly 200,000 health plan members across 250,000 square miles.

Since 2011, Sanford Health has invested in increasing access to specialty care in the Bemidji area, including behavioral health, cardiology, surgery, orthopedics and oncology. As a result, Sanford Bemidji Medical Center has become the region's largest hospital, housing 118 licensed beds and serving more than 176,000 people in Beltrami, Lake of the Woods, Koochiching, Itasca, Cass, Hubbard and Clearwater counties.

We are proud to provide comprehensive services, support and investments to respond to the current and future health needs of our communities. These programs improve access to affordable, high-quality care, enhance public health, reduce barriers and address health disparities – all while making our communities more resilient.

Regional Numbers

Clinic locations: 17

Medical centers: 2

Sanford Bemidji Medical Center Key Recognitions

- CMS 4-star hospital
- The Joint Commission: The Gold Seal of Approval for Sanford Bemidji Medical Center and Clinics, Home Care, Hip & Knee Joint Replacement and Sanford Bemidji Crisis Center Inpatient Behavioral Health
- White Bison Wellbriety Certified Treatment Center
- Minnesota Department of Health: Operational Excellence Award 2023
- Blue Cross Blue Shield: Blue Distinction Center for Maternity Care
- Minnesota Department of Human Services: Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic
- American College of Radiology: Diagnostic Imaging Center of Excellence
- American College of Surgeons: National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers and Commission on Cancer accredited cancer program
- Becker's Healthcare "Great Community Hospitals" (2023 and 2024)



In 2022, Sanford Health invested over \$87 million in the Bemidji region to provide essential services and programs.

RURAL CARE CHALLENGES

People living in rural America face unique challenges. They are more likely to have fewer resources to access care and to experience higher rates of poverty and chronic disease, as well as food and housing insecurity. These challenges often lead to poorer health outcomes. That's why our care extends beyond our medical centers and clinics. We are active in the communities we serve and invest substantial resources to drive more opportunities and better health for all.

COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Every three years, Sanford Health conducts a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to learn more about the health and well-being of the populations we serve. The CHNA allows us to identify and address unmet health needs through local partnerships and initiatives.

The responses from past surveys have led to the development of new community health initiatives, offerings and programs in areas such as children's care, mental health, rural health care access and health equity. The most recent CHNA survey published in 2022 found challenges related to economic factors, access to care, healthy living resources and mental health. Since the findings were published, Sanford Health in Bemidji has implemented several strategies and programs to help address these community concerns.

CARE FOR ALL

Sanford Health is proud to provide care to anyone who comes to us in need, regardless of their ability to pay. As a nonprofit organization, we provide a robust community care program to help our patients who are uninsured or experiencing financial hardship to be able to access care in hospitals and clinics across our health system.

Sanford Health's financial assistance program provides discounted or free services to patients. Over 90% of patients who request financial assistance receive it.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

Sanford Health offers [financial assistance](#) for patients who need medically necessary services or emergency care. This assistance, which can range from a balance reduction to complete forgiveness, is provided to patients demonstrating financial need. In 2023, Sanford Health provided over \$7 million in financial assistance to patients in the Bemidji area.

To reduce language and literacy barriers, our financial assistance application has been simplified to a two-page document and translated into the top languages spoken by the populations we serve, including Chinese, German, Hindi, Korean, Laotian, Spanish and Vietnamese.

We have also implemented a presumptive community care policy. Instead of waiting for a patient to come to us after a bill has been sent to collections, we proactively evaluate some of the patient's demographic information and other factors to determine if they might need financial assistance.

CONNECTING PATIENTS WITH COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Sanford Health has a database that helps patients [find and access community resources](#). The website sanford.findhelp.com compiles information to help address basic needs such as housing, food, transportation and childcare. After entering their zip code, a patient can see free or reduced-cost programs nearby. This resource is available to anyone in need.

In 2023, users of the Sanford Find Help platform increased by 10%, with top search topics relating to food, housing, health and financial needs.

Clinicians and nurses can also navigate the site on behalf of a patient, referring them directly to an organization for assistance. To ensure equitable access, the site is translated into multiple languages and allows staff to print, text or email information to a patient.

PROVIDING LOCAL AID

Sanford Health helps patients in need through the Providing Needed Aid to Patients Locally ([PNAPL](#)) Foundation Fund. The fund aims to help patients experiencing financial hardships meet their basic needs. Funds are used to help establish patient self-management and to get items that will streamline care like blood pressure cuffs, scales, pulse oximeters, pill boxes, wheelchairs, shower chairs and dressing supplies. Funds can also be used for copays and transportation.

PRESCRIPTION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A medical diagnosis can often cause a financial burden, and an inability to afford medication can prevent someone from fully recovering both physically and financially. Sanford Health's [prescription assistance program](#) offers tiered assistance based on income level to help patients afford their medication. If a patient indicates they can't afford their medication, clinicians can presumptively qualify them. Patients who meet program guidelines are eligible for six months of prescription assistance.

In 2023, Sanford Health provided over \$290,000 in prescription assistance to Bemidji area patients.

COMMUNITY GIVING

Each year, Sanford Health gives over \$1 million in donations and sponsorships to over 250 local community partners in Bemidji and the surrounding area. In 2023, these partners included the United Way of Bemidji Area, Family Advocacy Center of Northern Minnesota, Bagley Education Endowment and Project Fund, Northwoods Battered Women's Shelter, Nameless Coalition for the Homeless, Evergreen Youth and Family Services Conference, Indigenous Nursing Conference, ISD 31 Career Academy, Red Lake Nation College, Walker Area Community Center, many local youth sports teams and more.

UNITED WAY OF BEMIDJI AREA

For more than a decade, Sanford Health has remained a consistent partner of United Way of Bemidji Area donating over \$850,000. Sanford Health also helped kick start funding for the United Way of Bemidji Area's Backpack Buddies Foodpack program, which has provided over 83,875 weekend food packs for children in 19 schools.

PINE PALS NEST CHILD CARE CENTER

In 2024, Sanford Health signed a contract with the local child care provider Pine Pals to facilitate a new daycare center within a former Sanford Health office building. In addition to providing the building, Sanford Health also covered the renovation of the space into a child care center.

Anticipated to open by fall 2024, the center will provide 30 spots for children ages 6 weeks to 35 months, helping address the community's need for more child care options. Tuition assistance will be available for families in need through the County Child Care Assistance Program and Early Learning Scholarships.

BEMIDJI VETERANS HOME

Committed to caring for veterans and their families with compassion and teamwork, Sanford Health donated 15 acres to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs to build a home for veterans in Bemidji. The Bemidji Veterans Home welcomed its first residents in early 2024. As the only medical facility in Bemidji, we partner with the MDVA to provide the services needed to care for veterans, including medical directorship and ancillary support like lab testing and therapy services.

NEW DAY CENTER

After relocating and expanding our behavioral health services in late 2021, Sanford Health donated the former Upper Mississippi Mental Health Center building to the Nameless Coalition for the Homeless as a drop-in center. The New Day Center provides a space for homeless community members to connect with services and access shelter, Wi-Fi and a mailing address.

EXPANDED ACCESS

Rural populations are more likely to travel long distances to access health care, particularly subspecialty services. This can be a significant burden. Many patients may face barriers paying for fuel or hotels, taking time off from work or finding child care.

Sanford Health is committed to ensuring our patients have access to high-quality care no matter where they live or the health challenges they face. Our integrated health system is uniquely positioned to improve the overall health of populations through new, innovative care delivery models. Open 24/7, 365 days a year, we are available whenever and wherever our patients need us, and we are committed to bringing care closer to home.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICES

In rural, sparsely populated areas, [air ambulance services](#) are crucial for patients who need immediate care. Sanford Health operates a fleet of four AirMed helicopters and four airplanes from bases in Bismarck, Dickinson and Fargo, North Dakota; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Bemidji, Minnesota.

With medical experts on board, these aircraft transport patients from emergency scenes or other health care locations for lifesaving care. Sanford AirMed crews can stabilize patients suffering from cardiac disease, trauma, burns, stroke, sepsis and more, and the team specializes in providing adult, pediatric, neonatal and maternal care.



More than 100,000 patients have safely flown with Sanford AirMed over the last four decades. AirMed aircraft travel more than 1.5 million miles a year.

VIRTUAL CARE

In 2021, Sanford Health launched a landmark \$350 [million virtual care initiative](#) to fundamentally transform how we deliver care by expanding access, improving the patient experience, advancing innovation through new research, and attracting and training a new generation of clinicians.

Virtual care is one of the most powerful tools we have to address the shortage of primary care doctors and specialists in rural America. When we provide the [most advanced technology close to home](#), patients can immediately access care, monitor their health, and connect with a trusted provider from home or nearby satellite clinic.

Over the last decade, Sanford Health has provided more than 760,000 virtual consults, saving patients from traveling over 29 million miles on country roads or through harsh winter weather to access high-quality care in time to make a difference.

EXPERT TRAUMA CARE

The Sanford Bemidji Medical Center is designated a Level III Trauma Center by the Minnesota Department of Health. To meet this designation, the hospital provides 24-hour immediate coverage by emergency medicine physicians, prompt availability of general surgeons and anesthesiologists, a comprehensive quality assessment program, transfer agreements with Level I and Level II Trauma Centers, and back-up care for rural and community hospitals.

FAMILIES FIRST: RURAL MATERNITY HEALTH COLLABORATIVE

After receiving a federal grant from the Rural Maternity and Obstetric Management Strategies program in 2021, Sanford Health partnered with Beltrami County Health and Human Services, Cass Lake Indian Health Services, PrimeWest Health, Red Lake Indian Health Services, Sanford Medical Center Fargo and Scenic Rivers Health Services to form the [Families First: Rural Maternity Health Collaborative](#).

Working together to break down barriers and provide individualized patient care, Families First expands and enhances available services, decreasing adverse patient outcomes, reducing costs and supporting patients so mothers, babies and their families thrive for generations to come. This collaborative approach unites our programs to coordinate prenatal and postpartum care, community referrals, transportation to appointments, participation incentives and more.

By supporting low-intervention birth practices and honoring the beliefs of Native American patients, the collaborative strives to empower women and improve the safety of deliveries throughout northern Minnesota. Ongoing projects include group prenatal care classes, home visit nursing programs, and virtual care appointments and monitoring.

SANFORD JOE LUEKEN CANCER CENTER

In 2018, Sanford Health opened the Sanford Joe Lueken Cancer Center, the region's largest cancer facility, in Bemidji. Offering comprehensive care in one location, the center provides radiation oncology, an infusion pharmacy, 3D mammography services, research and clinical trials, nutrition services, nurse navigation support, financial counseling, genetic counseling and survivorship services. Since opening, the Sanford Joe Lueken Cancer Center has served thousands of patients, giving them access to necessary treatments close to home.

In fall 2023, Sanford Health in Bemidji installed a state-of-the-art Varian linear accelerator at the center. This new machine generates three-dimensional images, giving clinicians the ability to target and destroy hard-to-reach cancerous cells in a precise area of the body with minimal exposure to surrounding healthy tissue. It also lets clinicians continuously monitor tumors during treatment. A tumor that might need up to 40 sessions of conventional radiation therapy might need less than five sessions with the new accelerator. As a result, patients do not need to travel as often and they experience fewer side effects, improving their overall treatment and healing experience.



CARDIOVASCULAR SERVICES

The Sanford Bemidji Heart and Vascular Center features a cardiology clinic, congestive heart failure clinic and multiple cardiac catheterization labs with prep and recovery areas. Since bringing interventional care to the region, the center now provides a broad spectrum of treatment solutions, including 24/7 emergent STEMI care, cardiac rehabilitation, vascular surgery, screenings, electrophysiology and more. Since 2020, the cardiovascular team has earned annual performance recognition from the American College of Cardiology's NCDR Chest Pain - MI Registry.

In spring 2024, an expansion of the Heart and Vascular Center was completed. This expansion included a new state-of-the-art cardiac catheterization lab, improved wayfinding and additional clinic space. Electrophysiology was also added as an additional specialty offering.

NETWORK CLINICS AND OUTREACH SERVICES

Serving patients throughout more than seven counties in northern Minnesota, Sanford Health currently operates a critical access hospital with rehab and ambulance services in Bagley as well as 11 network locations in Bagley, Clearbrook, Red Lake, Kelliher, Cass Lake, Blackduck, International Falls, Park Rapids and Walker. These locations provide primary care, eye care and optical services, kidney dialysis, pharmacy services, outpatient rehab and behavioral health care.

Sanford Health clinicians in Bemidji frequently provide a wide variety of additional outreach services at these locations and others throughout the region. As of March 2024, this included outreach offerings at non-Sanford Health locations in Red Lake, Baudette, Cass Lake, International Falls, Bigfork and Roseau. Outreach services and specialties include orthopedics, sleep medicine, nephrology, obstetrics and gynecology, general surgery, cardiology, podiatry, bariatrics, oncology, ophthalmology, interventional pain management, dermatology, optometry, behavioral health and internal medicine.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Increased access to behavioral health care is a vital part of Sanford Health's effort to address community health needs. Sanford Health provides comprehensive behavioral health services across our footprint, ranging from psychological evaluations and substance use disorder programs to in-school child and adolescent therapy.

As a rural health care system, we understand the unique barriers our communities face in accessing behavioral health care, and we are addressing these issues on multiple fronts to ensure every patient has access to the expert care and support they need, when they need it.

Sanford Health is dedicated to building a comprehensive continuum of care in Bemidji that includes a wide range of community-based programs and services to assist before, during and after a behavioral health crisis.

CERTIFIED COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINICS

In 2023, Sanford Health Behavioral Health of Northern Minnesota is a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), adopting an outpatient, integrated care model developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This model incorporates care coordination and cost-based payment methodology with goals to increase access to community-based mental health and substance use disorder services, advance integration of behavioral health with physical health care, and improve consistent usage of evidence-based practices. Part of how CCBHCs increase access is to "step out of the clinic four walls," meaning they strive to serve people out in the community, in their homes or via telehealth whenever possible.





Over 60 integrated health therapists work side-by-side with primary care teams in over 65 clinics across our rural footprint either in-person or through virtual care.

VIRTUAL VISITS FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

In addition to having over 25 local counselors and behavioral health clinicians, Sanford Health recently launched an option for patients to [self-schedule a virtual behavioral health](#) appointment. These appointments do not require a referral from a primary care provider and are available to patients ages 10 and older. Patients directly schedule appointments, reducing stigma and ensuring they have timely care when they need it.

Sanford Health's emergency departments are virtually connected with psychiatrists to ensure patients with emergent behavioral health concerns are triaged quickly. In an emergency, a psychiatrist sees a patient virtually, consults with the on-site provider and recommends next steps, including transfer to an in-patient behavioral health unit if necessary or discharge home with a safety plan in place.

To further increase access to behavioral health care, integrated health therapists (IHTs) are embedded into primary care clinics and oncology departments across Sanford Health. If a patient expresses a need or a provider identifies a patient who would benefit from further assessment, the IHT is on site to have a conversation immediately, simplifying the process for patients and ensuring they leave their current appointment with a follow-up plan.

24/7 CRISIS AND INPATIENT PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

Our Mobile Crisis Response Services team offers 24/7 emergency and crisis services for children, families and adults. This includes immediate community-based intervention in addition to support, resources and referrals over the phone, as needed.

In partnership with the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County and the Minnesota Department of Health, Sanford Health opened the Sanford Bemidji Crisis Center in 2023. This center includes an innovative EmPATH unit, short for Emergency Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment and Healing. This model of care provides urgent behavioral health care and treatment in a supportive, calming environment. The EmPATH facility is comprised of family, adult and children's spaces that allow patients to decompress and receive individually tailored care for up to 23 hours. Staffed by behavioral health specialists, the facility is the first in the state to feature separate EmPATH units for adults and children. There are also spaces that have been designed for cultural and spiritual healing, particularly for Indigenous patients.

The Sanford Bemidji Crisis Center also has an inpatient psychiatric unit with eight beds for adults who need more extensive care and medication management. This is the only unit of its kind within 90 miles of Bemidji. It keeps patients close to home so they can be connected to local outpatient services for follow-up care.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The Sanford Health behavioral health department frequently offers mental health crisis presentations and trainings to staff and the public. Over the past two years, these offerings included four Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Trainings with over 100 participants, Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality trainings, and three regional Crisis Intervention Training events with over 75 law enforcement, correctional officers, dispatchers, crisis team members, first responders and mental health professionals.

In addition, the department offers a monthly training series on mental health-related topics. This series is open to other partners and departments like hospital case management, the emergency department and Center City Housing Corp. In summer 2024, the behavioral health department is partnering with Bemidji State University, Evergreen Youth and Family Services and other community organizations to provide educational opportunities on a wide variety of behavioral health care topics.

SCHOOL-BASED CHILD AND ADOLESCENT THERAPY

Early detection and treatment are key to addressing the emotional and behavioral needs of children. Sanford Health's Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports (CTSS) help diagnose and treat behavioral health needs in children ages 5 to 18 while assisting their families with family skills and therapy, as well as individual skills and therapy.

Services are offered in the office, home, community or in local schools. Though the list of schools varies each year, Sanford Health was able to offer in-school services during the 2023-2024 school year at Northern Elementary, Solway Elementary, Horace May Elementary, JW Smith Elementary, Schoolcraft Learning Community, Lincoln Elementary, Gene Dillon Elementary, Trek North and Voyageurs charter schools.

Youth Assertive Community Treatment (Youth ACT) rehabilitative service helps youth and families that have tried lower levels of care, but their debilitating mental health symptoms were not lessened or eliminated. Youth ACT uses a multi-disciplinary team approach to provide community and family-based, intensive mental health services, such as therapy, psychiatric medication management, substance use disorder treatment, skills training and peer support.

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TREATMENT

Sanford Health's substance use disorder program specializes in treating people struggling with substance use disorders and mental health problems. It offers comprehensive assessments and outpatient intensive substance use treatment using best practices and trauma-informed care, including group counseling and individual substance use counseling. The program offers personalized abstinence-based and harm reduction-based services. Many support groups are available, including women's, men's, co-ed, adolescent, cultural and skills-based groups.

In addition, Sanford Health was the first non-Native American healthcare organization to obtain certification from White Bison as a [Wellbriety Certified Treatment Center](#) offering a culturally based recovery program for Native Americans. The substance use disorder team has dual-licensed professionals embedded for a truly integrated approach.

INTENSIVE RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT SERVICES AND CRISIS STABILIZATION SERVICES

Created in partnership with Beltrami County and PrimeWest Health Services, Sanford Health PrimeWest Residential Support Center in Bemidji, Minnesota, is a voluntary residential treatment facility for adults who are experiencing a psychiatric or mental health crisis and need short-term mental health care. The center offers two residential programs providing tailored treatment, including an assessment of the patient's immediate needs, daily crisis stabilization, supportive and short-term problem-solving counseling, medication monitoring, skills training, and collaboration and coordination with agencies, providers and families.

Patients in residential crisis stabilization (RCS) can stay for up to 10 days. The goal of the RCS program is to help patients get back to where they were before a crisis so they can enjoy being a part of their communities again. Patients in intensive residential treatment services (IRTS) can stay for up to 90 days. The IRTS program aims to help individuals regain independent living skills and better manage mental health symptoms.



MEDICAL RESEARCH

Clinical trials are key to advancing the science of medicine and helping patients quickly benefit from new discoveries. However, clinical trial recruitment has historically been focused in larger urban areas. Sanford Health is committed to pursuing cures and improving treatments for communities in the rural U.S.

ACCESS TO CLINICAL TRIALS CLOSE TO HOME

Giving patients access to early-phase clinical trials close to home greatly improves their care and advances research to bring new treatments – and hope – to our patients. Sanford Research, a multisite biomedical research institute headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is involved in over 300 clinical trials that aim to improve the prevention, detection, treatment and survivorship of a wide range of diseases, from diabetes, cystic fibrosis and COVID-19 to eating disorders and cancers.

Sanford Research offers cancer clinical trials in seven locations: Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Fargo and Bismarck, North Dakota; and Bemidji, Ortonville, Worthington and Thief River Falls, Minnesota. The sites collaborate to advance cancer research and care across the Midwest.

At any one given time, we have approximately 70 clinical trials open for patient enrollment. In Bemidji, this also includes on-site access to the latest clinical trials through the [Minnesota Cancer Clinical Trials Network](#).

PHARMACOGENOMIC TESTING

Sanford Imagenetics offers pharmacogenomic (PGx) testing, both in person and virtually. This simple genetic test can provide information to patients and their providers about how they will process medications with the goal to increase efficacy, decrease trial and error, and reduce side effects. Our clinical pharmacists review all pharmacogenetic results to deliver accurate treatment guidance and education.

PEDIATRICS AND RARE DISEASE RESOURCES

Sanford Health's Population Level Estimate of type 1 Diabetes risk Genes in children ([PLEDGE](#)) study works to screen and identify children at risk of developing type 1 diabetes or celiac disease. First launched in 2020, the program provides education, ongoing monitoring and appropriate early intervention to prevent serious illness for children with risk markers. We offer the study in over 126 clinics and have screened over 8,500 patients to date.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Poverty and other social barriers, such as a lack of access to healthy foods, stable housing, transportation, education and employment, are particularly acute in rural areas. At Sanford Health, we are active in the communities we serve and invest substantial resources to drive more opportunities and better health for all.



In 2023, Sanford Health provided financial support to over 250 local nonprofit organizations serving our communities.

ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY

Many of Sanford Health's hospitals and clinics operate wellness pantries, such as the food and essentials bank within the Children's department at the Sanford Bemidji 1611 Anne St. Clinic. Opened in May 2023, the pantry served nearly 12,000 pounds of food to approximately 220 families in its first six months.

CHILD LITERACY

In 2019, Sanford Health adopted the national [Reach Out and Read program](#). Through the program, pediatricians prescribe reading during each well child visit and give children ages 6 months to 5 years old a free book. This way every family who comes in for care has direct access to literature, no matter their socioeconomic status.

LOW-INCOME RESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

Sanford Health partnered with Bemidji Rotary Club to improve wellness for an underserved part of the community through the [Ridgeway Neighborhood Initiative](#). This initiative helps residents of this low-income area with housing, food and health care access. Through the initiative, Sanford Health employees have hosted vaccine clinics, offered on-site care and provided food and other essential supplies.

HOUSING STABILITY

We recognize housing as a basic right. The Stable Housing Program helps community members who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness to obtain safe and affordable housing. Housing navigators help people fill out housing applications, obtain vital documents, find apartments, connect with landlords, obtain housing vouchers and develop plans for long-term housing stability. They also assist with possible referrals to individual, family or group therapy, supported employment, adult rehabilitative mental health services, peer support services, substance use disorder services, medical services, GED services and case management.

Over the past seven years, the program has assisted hundreds of community members in need. Recently, the program also began providing outreach services at the New Day Center managed by the Nameless Coalition for the Homeless.

ASSISTING INCARCERATED POPULATIONS

Sanford Health Behavioral Health Center's New Beginnings Re-Entry Project helps individuals make a successful return to their families and communities as responsible, contributing citizens after incarceration. The project's mission is to reduce recidivism by expanding reentry services, resources and ongoing support for participants.

Through needs assessments, the New Beginnings Re-Entry Project connects individuals with substance use disorder treatment, recovery support services, mental health diagnostic assessments and counseling, cultural activities and healing practices, job skills training, family and parenting counseling, medical or dental care and housing programs. Individuals can also get help with obtaining identification, such as a birth certificate, Social Security number or a driver's license.

Because of programs like this one, Minnesota's adult recidivism rates have remained remarkably stable. About 65% of offenders remain free of felony convictions for three years after their release.

FAMILY ADVOCACY

The Family Advocacy Center of Northern Minnesota (FACNM) is an abuse assessment center that offers comprehensive medical care, treatment and a coordinated victim-centered response to those who have been physically or sexually abused. Sanford Health is a proud partner of the center, funding monthly rent and operations expenses and providing a dedicated clinician who is trained to provide age-appropriate, comprehensive and trauma-sensitive medical exams.

MEDICINE AND SHARPS DISPOSAL

Unused, expired or improperly disposed medications, needles, syringes or lancets pose significant safety risks for people of all ages. To combat this, we have installed a community MedSafe Medical Disposal System and a sharps container drop-box at the Sanford Bemidji 1611 Anne St. Clinic. Both disposal systems provide a safe, secure and convenient way for community members to dispose of these types of medical waste at no cost to them.

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERISM

Sanford Health is proud to offer all employees [paid volunteer time off](#). We understand the critical role our employees play in our communities, and we encourage our full-time team members to commit up to eight paid hours per year to 501(c)3 or 501(c)6 organizations.

In 2023, Sanford Health employees in Bemidji logged 257 hours of volunteer paid time off.



HEALTH EQUITY

Sanford Health is focused on making care more equitable by addressing the social determinants of health and working upstream to improve them. This work includes removing barriers to access, such as lack of transportation, provider shortages and health disparities, including food and housing insecurity, poverty and a lack of health education.



ADDRESSING BIAS IN HEALTH CARE

Sanford Health has identified closing minority health care disparities [as a priority](#). Bias in health care can lead to inequalities in treatment and outcomes. We are actively [educating providers](#) on ways to support every patient, particularly those with marginalized identities. Through multiple education opportunities and ongoing professional development, our health care providers are learning to recognize and mitigate biases, ultimately improving care for all patients.

RESOURCES FOR A DIVERSE PATIENT POPULATION

Sanford Health serves 26 Tribal Nations, several of which are located within the poorest counties in the U.S. Sanford Bemidji Medical Center is located centrally between three Tribal Nations—Red Lake Band of Chippewa, White Earth Nation and Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

Our [Native American community advocates](#) in Bemidji, focus on providing comfort and improving trust with Native American patients. With an understanding of the local Ojibwe culture and historical contexts, a health advocate serves as a bridge between patients and health care providers, helping to identify and assist with patient needs at the Sanford Bemidji Medical Center and the Sanford Joe Lueken Cancer Center. Through culturally appropriate care and support, we are working to address disparities in health care access and outcomes faced by Indigenous people who make up nearly a quarter of the patient population in the Bemidji region.

EMPLOYEE EDUCATION

Educating our employees about local Ojibwe culture and history is part of enhancing the care we provide. Partnering with author and Professor of Ojibwe at Bemidji State University, Anton Treuer, PhD, Sanford Health created several employee educational courses and resources to discuss the intersection of Ojibwe culture and health care. Culturally specific education has also been integrated into annual nursing trainings in collaboration with a policy supporting patient access to resources for smudging ceremonies and sacred objects. In addition, culturally-specific annual training is a requirement for all Sanford Health employees in Bemidji.

LISTENING TO PATIENTS, ELDERS AND TRIBAL LEADERS

With the assistance of Native American community advocates, Sanford Health recently created a patient/community focus group, Native American Advisory Council, and an internal, multidisciplinary committee to identify opportunities to improve care and create a more culturally welcoming environment.

We take responsibility for continuously learning more about culturally appropriate care, knowing it includes spiritual, emotional, mental and physical healing. We have been working with local Indigenous community elders, educators and tribal leaders. They have generously shared their wisdom and spiritual guidance to build positive relationships and improve health disparities.



HEALTHY LIVING PROGRAMMING

[Better Choices, Better Health®: Living Well](#) workshops are for people with lifelong health conditions, such as arthritis, cancer, chronic pain, depression, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, lung disease or multiple sclerosis. These free workshops are open to adults ages 18 or older and their caregivers. They create a supportive environment where attendees learn how to reduce their pain, increase their energy, work with their provider on a treatment plan and get the most out of the activities they love. Sanford Health also offers a variety of additional educational opportunities throughout the year, including free talks with doctors and support groups.

HEART, VASCULAR AND BLOOD SCREENINGS

Early detection and treatment can have a huge impact on a patient's outcome. Sanford Health offers several opportunities throughout the year for community members to get screenings, whether or not they have a primary care provider or health insurance. Our team hosts heart and vascular screenings a couple days each month. Depending on their results, patients may be referred to a cardiovascular specialist for follow-up assessment and treatment.

In partnership with the Bemidji and Park Rapids Rotary Clubs, Sanford Health hosts multi-day blood screening events every year in each community. All proceeds from these screening events support local rotary projects like playground equipment updates and the Bemidji Police Department K9 Program.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The future health of our communities rests on our ability to attract and develop highly trained clinicians and employees. Sanford Health has prioritized breakthrough initiatives to support the caregivers we need today and cultivate the workforce we know we will need tomorrow.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Sanford Health facilities serve as clinical and non-clinical [training sites](#) for thousands of students every year. We work locally with high school students on career exploration and partner with secondary academic institutions to provide students with learning experiences that are second to none. By introducing young people to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs and activities, we hope to inspire future generations of health care professionals who will care for our communities well into the future.

Through Aspire by Sanford, kindergarten through 12th-grade students have opportunities to explore careers in health care and develop the skills necessary for success in the workforce. With hands-on learning experiences and mentorship opportunities, the program seeks to inspire the next generation of health care professionals to enter the workforce. Exploratory programs like summer camps and Sanford Bemidji MedX give high school students hands-on activities, tours and presentations led by local health care professionals.

Sanford Health has provided over \$1 million in partnership with Bemidji High School, Bemidji State University and Northwest Technical College to provide professional development opportunities, scholarships and programs for local students interested in health care careers.

In fall 2023, Sanford Health, Bemidji High School, Bemidji State University and Northwest Technical College collectively unveiled an on-site training lab in Bemidji High School for students to use during certified nursing assistant training.

STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Sanford Health supports students pursuing careers in high-growth positions like medical assistants, dialysis technicians, surgical technologists and medical laboratory technicians. Through partnerships with various schools, financial assistance is provided to help students achieve their career goals. In some high-demand professions, participating schools offer financial aid in exchange for a student's work commitment to Sanford Health.

Twelve different scholarship programs are offered in the Bemidji area, many of which give out multiple scholarships annually. In 2023, Sanford Health provided over \$30,000 in local scholarships to those pursuing a career in health care. Sanford Health also offers local sponsorships (virtual and in person) for 15 different roles, including certified medical assistants, licensed practical nurses, medical laboratory technicians and scientists, nuclear medicine technologists, pharmacy technicians, phlebotomists, radiologists, registered nurses, respiratory therapists and surgical technologists.

In addition to scholarships and sponsorships, financial assistance through the Sanford Health Employee Assistance Program is also available for all current employees who are continuing their education in a field that will enhance their contributions to our organization and those we serve.



MEDICAL STUDENT EDUCATION

Sanford Health is proud to partner with regional medical schools, including the University of Minnesota's Rural Physician Associates Program, Des Moines College of Osteopathic Medicine, the University of North Dakota and Dartmouth College, to prepare students for practicing in rural communities. Through these partnerships, students engage in an immersive year-long experience living in Bemidji while learning firsthand from local clinicians in family medicine, pediatrics, internal medicine, OB/GYN, surgery, psychiatry and emergency medicine.

GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

In partnership with Hennepin Health Care and the University of North Dakota, Sanford Health hosts their emergency medicine, psychiatry and surgery residents for a rural rotation. These residents spend a month in Bemidji learning about life and practicing medicine in rural communities. Rural rotations like these have been shown to influence a physician's choice in practice location.



LEARN MORE

Making our communities stronger and healthier is at the core of everything we do at Sanford Health. As the nation's premier rural health care system, we're committed to reducing access barriers, improving public health and strengthening community resilience.

To learn more about our involvement in our communities, please visit sanfordhealth.org/about/community-commitment.

THANK YOU

To everyone who contributed to this year's
Sanford Health Community Commitment Report
- Bemidji Region:

Amber Langner	Kari Timms
Amy Hinkemeyer	Karla Eischens
Amy Magnuson	Kate Zimmerman
Anna Chock	Katelyn Galligan
Ashlea McMartin	Kayla Winkler
Catie LeMay	Kirsten Craft
Dane Furfaro	Lindsey Wangberg
Danielle Kleszyk	Lisa Johnson
Dr. Stephen Rith-Najarian	Megan Hansen
Erin Echternach	Melinda Broden
Grace Beuch	Merri McCarthy
Hannah Johnson	Rebekah Fineday
Helean Robertson	Sally Corser
Jesse Breidenbach	Sarah Sherwood
Jessica Hublit	Stacey Kaslon
Jessica Sexe	Susan Hudson
Jillian Johnson	Tabitha Chilton
Jonathan Friedt	Taylor Rickers
Kaileigh Chapman	Vicki Roff
Kalee Browne	



As caregivers, we believe that it is not only our duty but also our calling to partner with our communities to help find solutions to the social and economic barriers that hold people back from living their best, healthiest lives.

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