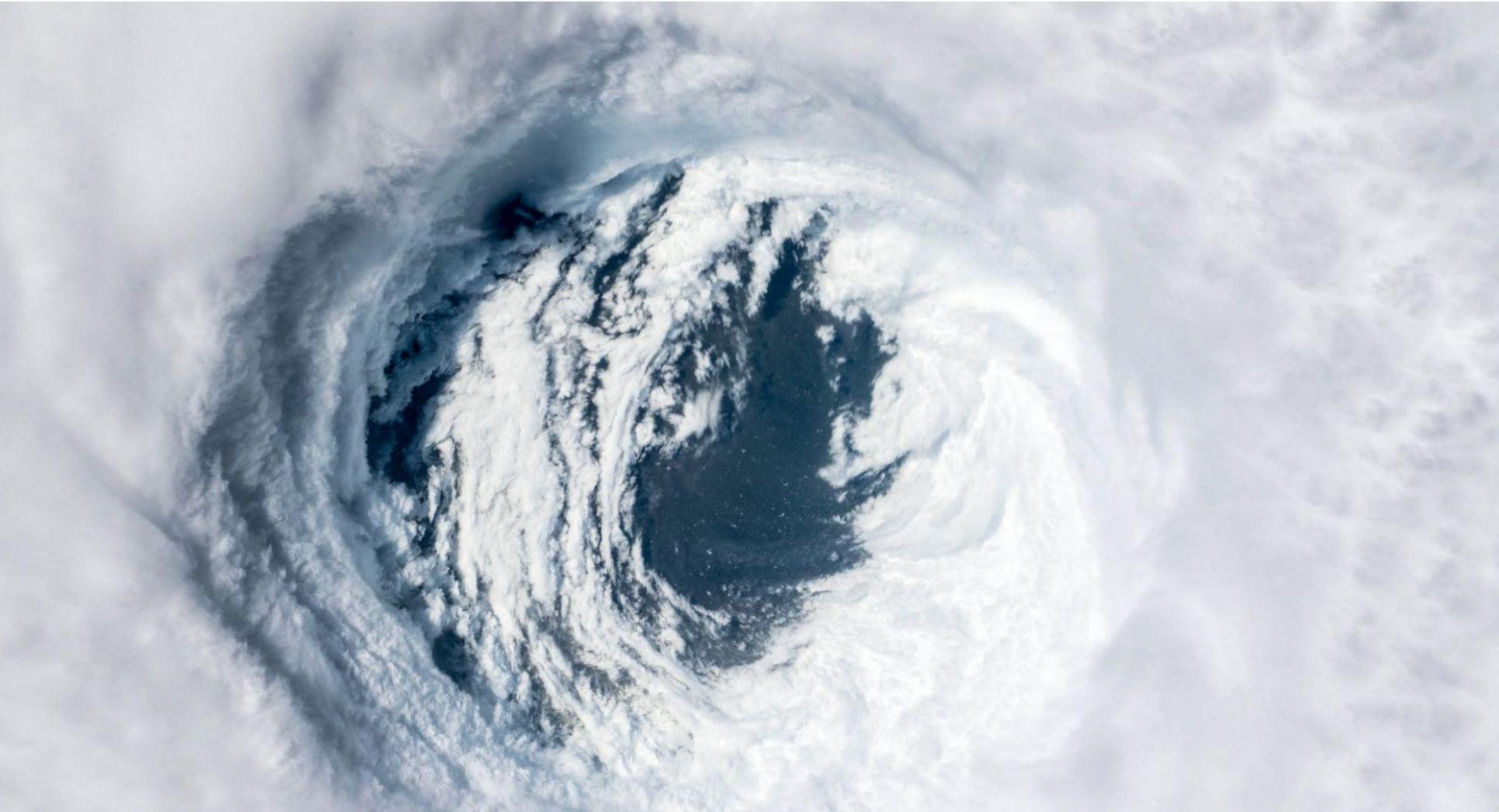


June 2024



# Climate Resiliency Plan

U.S. Health and Human Services Health Sector Climate Pledge

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# About Ascension

Ascension is a faith-based healthcare organization that delivers personalized, compassionate care to all, especially to those who are poor and vulnerable.

In FY23, Ascension provided \$2.2 billion for care of persons living in poverty and community benefit.

Our Mission-driven work is carried out through a number of services and subsidiaries dedicated to providing healthcare services and delivery to support personalized care.

## **About the Cover:**

The photo is of Hurricane Michael (2018), which severely damaged Ascension Sacred Heart Bay (Panama City, Florida). Ascension is working to ensure our facilities are resilient to climate change-related weather events.

# Purpose Statement

Ascension's commitment to reducing our environmental footprint and achieving sustainability is **rooted in our Mission**, which calls us to be **advocates for a compassionate and just society** in our actions and our words.

Through Catholic social teaching, we recognize the **human dignity** of all people and the common good as we work toward **equitable access to resources** to improve community health and the lives of individuals we serve.

# Ascension's Sustainability Goals

Ascension set two FY21-FY23 goals: achieve a 5% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions at the end of FY23 from our FY20 baseline, and a 6% reduction of municipal solid waste (MSW) at the end of FY23 from our FY19 baseline, normalized by pounds of MSW per patient per day.

These goals helped kickstart progress toward our 2040 goals.

FY21-FY23

Since these goals were established, Ascension reduced greenhouse gas emissions from acute care facilities by more than **9%** and municipal solid waste to landfill by more than **8%**.

2030

Reduce carbon emissions by **50%**. Reduce **50%** of nonhazardous waste from all managed facilities.

2040

Achieve **net zero carbon emissions** and **zero waste** across all sites of care.

Read more about Ascension's Environmental Impact and Sustainability program in the **Appendix** of this Plan.

# Program Structure

**Ascension's Environmental Impact and Sustainability program is positioned to minimize environmental impact with activities focused in three pillars of work:**



**Net Zero Places** is focused on carbon sources associated with physical environments – energy and water management, and sustainable transportation.



**Responsible Supply Chain** is focused on the flow of goods from procurement through disposition after use – sustainable sourcing, product usage management, recycling and waste management.



**Healthy Communities** examines our communities and social determinants of health to design programs and processes that support interventions to address environmental effects on patients and create healthier environments.

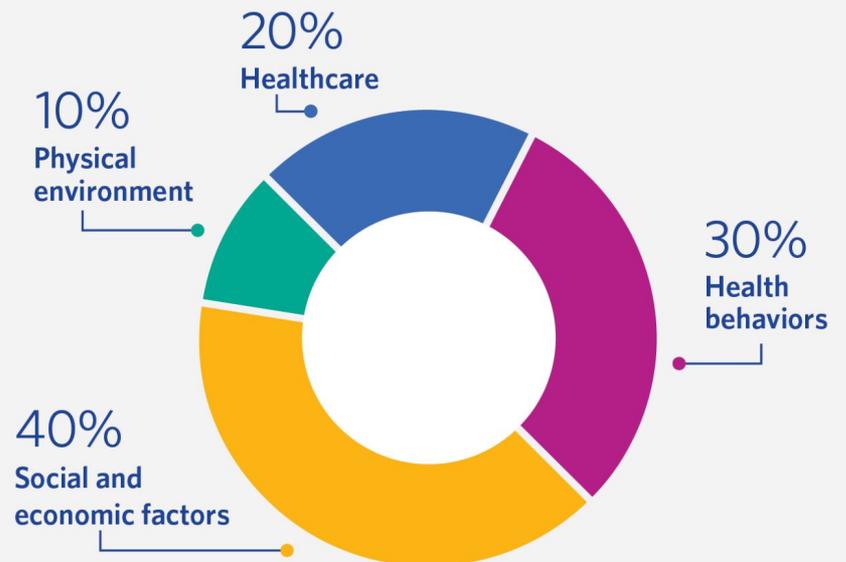
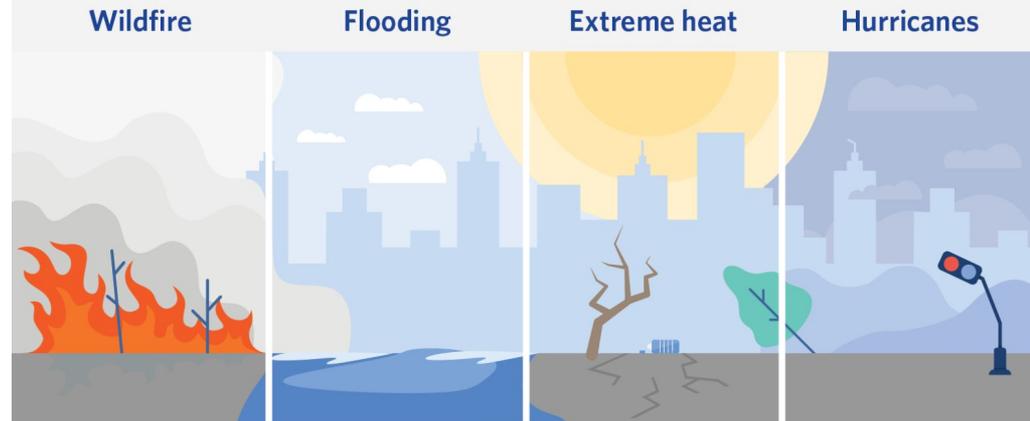
# Social Determinants of Health

Climate change has the potential to impact every community Ascension serves. Extreme heat days are more common in Austin. Places like Nashville have experienced more frequent and intense rain events due to increased atmospheric temperatures. As oceans absorb heat, hurricane seasons are starting earlier and becoming more severe, as seen in Jacksonville on the Atlantic Coast and Pensacola on the Gulf Coast.

The core of Ascension's Environmental Impact and Sustainability program is **healthy communities**: exploring the relationship between sustainability and the social determinants of health; and linking this to Ascension's Mission to sustain and improve community health and the lives of individuals we are privileged to serve.

Extreme weather conditions brought about by climate change affect the **social determinants of health (SDOH)**, which are conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. SDOH include healthcare access and quality; education access and quality; social and community context; economic stability and neighborhood and built environment (CDC.gov).

Impacts of climate change are worsening and will profoundly affect the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)





# Climate Resiliency Plan

Ascension created this Plan through the **Healthy Communities** pillar of the Environmental Impact and Sustainability program to share examples of the innovation we are infusing into our daily work in resilience, emergency preparedness, and community impact.

# Health Equity and Community Engagement

Healthcare's impact on the environment is significant and linked to the health of the communities and patients in our care. The focus for Ascension is the patient, especially those who are experiencing poverty and vulnerability.

One example is the many coastal cities Ascension serves. Ascension is using all available tools and resources to measure when, and where, climate-related weather events may impact these communities. Additional examples of Ascension working to identify and address the needs of high-risk patients include:



Ascension markets partner with our community members and organizations every three years to develop **Community Health Needs Assessments** and implement strategies to determine voiced areas of need and necessary collaborative tactics within our surrounding communities to address priority areas on which to focus.



Ascension developed a standardized **screening tool** in 2021 to help address social needs, with over 2.3 million screenings to date in primary care and specialty offices including pediatrics and obstetrics. The program will expand to our inpatient setting in FY24.



Ascension's Community Impact team set a vision aimed at improving the health of communities and achieving a deeper understanding of who our patients are, where they live, and the barriers they face every day by launching the **Maternal Health Social Systems Initiative** in 2019. The initiative has teams present in Wisconsin, Michigan, Florida, and Tennessee.

# Health Equity and Community Engagement

The **Healthy Communities workgroup** is addressing climate change-related social determinants of health by using resources from the Ascension Data Science Institute, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to design pre-emptive strategies that benefit the communities we serve. The team is developing a project to predict asthma-related emergency department visits in vulnerable pediatric and adult patients by utilizing air pollution and weather impact data sources.

“

**“Air pollution and weather patterns will be tracked to inform high-risk patients of their elevated health concerns. The goal is to integrate patient and community-level data with real-time weather and pollution patterns. Diagnoses occurring at the Ascension hospital nearest the patient can help estimate the person's risk of having asthma events that would lead to a preventable emergency department visit.”**

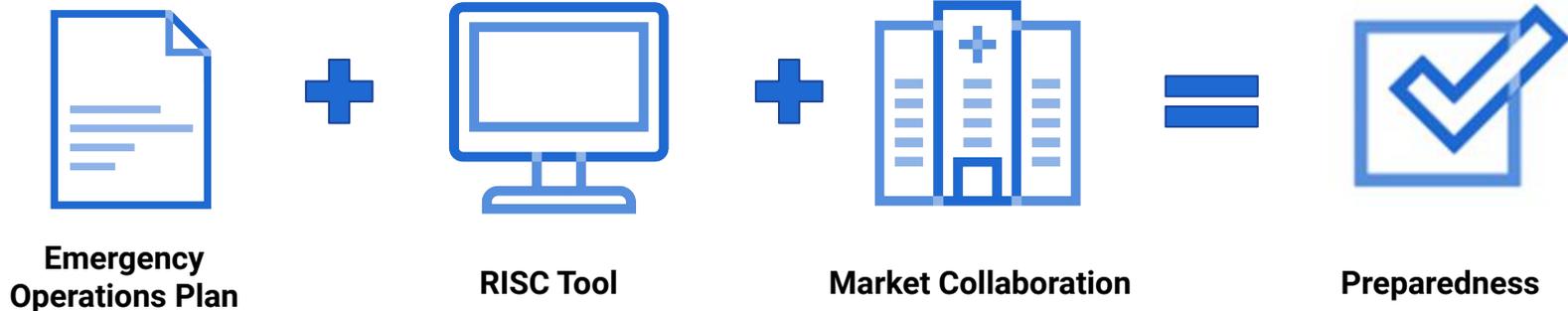
**“Indiana, Michigan, Texas, and Florida have the highest asthma-related ED visit volume. In FY23, Ascension experienced nearly 4,000 asthma-related ED visits among vulnerable and underinsured patients in these markets. Ascension has the potential to prevent nearly 2,000 ED visits related to asthma and reduce revenue shortfall among underinsured patients by \$1.2 million.”**

**— Dr. Stacy Garrett-Ray  
Senior Vice President and Chief Community Impact Officer  
Ascension**

# Prospective Risk Assessment

Ascension sites of care employ an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) as the official planning document to prepare, respond to, recover from, and mitigate severe weather events. The EOP is reviewed and updated at least annually or more frequently per lessons learned from real events, exercises, and/or guidance from local, state, or federal authorities through Medxcel, Ascension's facilities management organization.

In addition, Ascension employs the Healthcare and Public Health (HPH) Risk Identification and Site Criticality (RISC) Tool, which is an objective, data-driven all-hazards risk assessment that can be used by public and private organizations within the HPH Sector to inform emergency preparedness planning, risk management activities, and resource investments.



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## Key Links

1. [RISC Toolkit 1.0](#)
2. [RISC Toolkit 2.0](#)

# Prospective Risk Assessment

An integral component of our forward-looking risk assessment capacity and capabilities is the Medical Intelligence Program innovation initiated by the Medxcel Emergency Management team. This tailored program leverages an array of digital tools and entails working closely with a wide range of collaborators to proactively identify and analyze "over the horizon" threats to our organization and its mission. By adopting these proactive strategies and techniques, Ascension can implement measures before a crisis emerges, thereby ensuring the continuity of our operations.

In addition to robust technology and analytics, the success of this program hinges on frequent consultations and face-to-face collaboration with experts and government officials across all functional areas that Ascension depends on to maintain operations, even in the most challenging emergency scenarios. The program has a track record of successes, such as predicting and effectively managing supply chain constraints, emerging diseases, weather and climate-related events, and energy disruptions. In many instances, our program has been weeks ahead of others in forecasting and mitigating the impact of potential events, showcasing its value and foresight.



# Assessment and Remediation of Vulnerabilities in Infrastructure and Operations

Ascension is using lessons learned from extreme weather events to ensure that our acute care hospitals are resilient and available as a place of refuge 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

With a comprehensive emergency management program tailored to each region we serve and by partnering with federal, state and local partners, we work to maintain full services at our sites of care. Further, as we understand the factors affecting those who are at an increased risk for negative health impacts associated with climate and climate change, we are able to identify vulnerable populations, educate our communities, and develop action plans to mitigate the impact of intense weather events.

## Climate change is a threat to human health

### Extreme Heat

Rising temperatures will lead to an increase in heat-related deaths and illnesses.

### Flooding

Increased coastal and inland flooding exposes populations to a range of negative health impacts before, during and after events.

### Mental Health and Well Being

Changes in exposure to climate- or weather-related disasters cause or exacerbate stress and mental health consequences, with greater risk for certain populations.

# Assessment and Remediation of Vulnerabilities in Infrastructure and Operations

Ascension is developing a **Health & Climate Resiliency Guide** for each of our markets as part of our strategy. The purpose of the template is to provide Ascension markets with tools and recommended relationships to build to support groups that experience a disproportionate risk of climate-related effects. Resources include municipal climate action plans, Ascension's Emergency Preparedness Plan and Community Benefit Team tools. Recommended relationships to build include Mayor's Offices and state Public Health Departments. Our goal is to achieve a deeper understanding of who our patients are, where they live and the barriers they face each day. By intervening upstream, Ascension can support underserved populations while complementing the care of our clinical teams.

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**“We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”**

**– His Holiness Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'***

# Collaboration between Healthcare Organizations

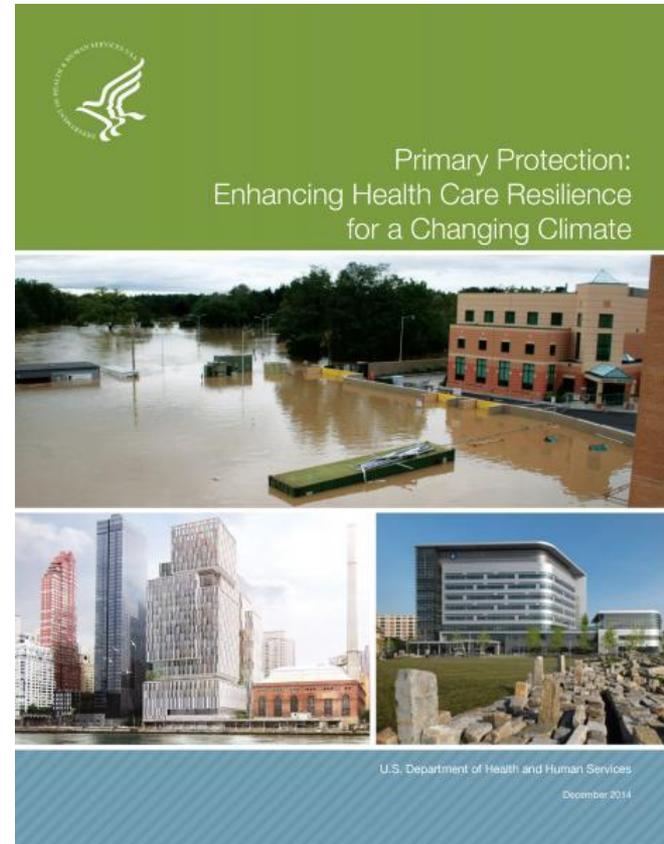
Ascension demonstrates leadership in healthcare sustainability through collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and with leading U.S. health systems in several organizations.

Ascension, operating through its wholly owned subsidiary Medxcel, actively contributes to the development and deployment of the **HHS RISC 2.0 Tool**. Medxcel was an early advocate for this system, and we have seamlessly integrated the toolkit across our entire healthcare system. Medxcel has collaborated closely with the HHS Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), serving as subject matter experts for an informative webinar and actively participating in the creation of the **Sustainable and Climate Resilient Healthcare Facilities Initiative Toolkit**.

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## Key Links

1. [RISC Toolkit 2.0](#)
2. [Sustainable and Climate Resilient Healthcare Facilities Initiative Toolkit](#)



***Primary Protection: Enhancing Health Care Resilience for a Changing Climate*** was published by HHS in 2014. Ascension contributed to this report which is a best practices document under the HHS Sustainable and Climate Resilient Health Care Facilities Initiative and had one of its facilities featured on the cover.

# Collaboration between Healthcare Organizations

Members of the Medxcel Emergency Management and Safety team are frequently sought after by other organizations and government bodies to provide expert guidance on the best practices for preparedness and response. Notably, two members of the Medxcel team have previously been entrusted with the development of the nationally recognized "Community Healthcare Planning and Response to Disasters –Management & Planning Level" program for the Department of Homeland Security's National Disaster Preparedness Consortium. This program sets a standardized benchmark for disaster preparedness across all states, territories, and tribal nations. Ascension remains unwavering in its commitment to fostering strong partnerships that enhance readiness, reduce risks, and bolster community resilience.



Ascension's **Health & Climate Resiliency Guides** identify the following items in the communities where we are located:

#### Partners:

- Mayor's offices
- State health departments
- Safety
- Ascension Community Benefit

#### Resources:

- Municipal climate action plans
- Ascension's Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Community Benefit Team tools

Ascension is a founding member of the **Health Care Climate Council**, part of **Health Care Without Harm**, which works to amplify public and private responses to climate change with mitigation, resilience, and leadership solutions.

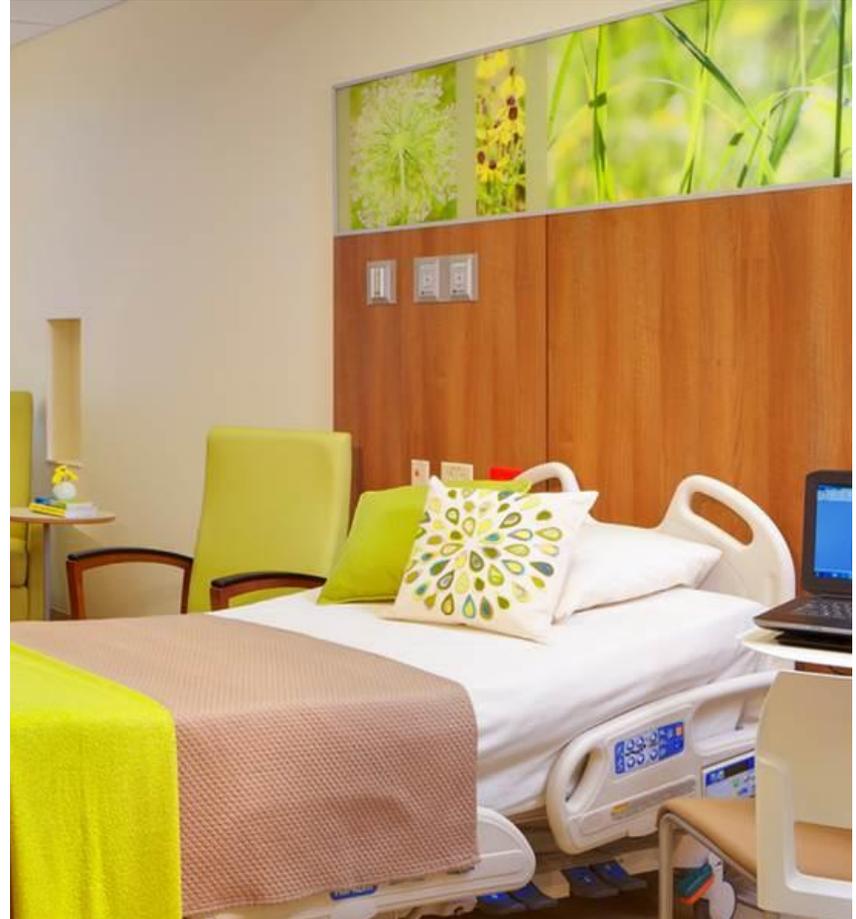
Ascension participated in the **National Academy of Medicine Action Collaborative on Decarbonizing the U.S. Health Sector**. Two team members sat on Phase 1 of the Health Care Supply Chain and Infrastructure Working Group. Both initiatives seek to partner with other healthcare providers to influence supplier behavior with regard to sustainability.

# Interdisciplinary Planning, Oversight, and Evaluation

Throughout Ascension, we employ a comprehensive and inclusive "all hazards - whole of society" approach to ensure a unified and thorough process for identifying, managing, and mitigating risks. Our distinctive approach harmonizes the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, guaranteeing our operational resilience during challenging times and providing our communities with the assurance of uninterrupted services.

To achieve this, our planning philosophy and subsequent emergency management response protocols are dynamic and adaptable. They are considered living documents, open to updates and modifications following any exercise or real-world event. This flexibility allows our teams to swiftly adjust our preparedness and response strategies as circumstances change, without having to wait for a formal review cycle.

*Pictured: Patient room within Ascension St. Vincent Fishers (Fishers, Indiana).*



# Interdisciplinary Planning, Oversight, and Evaluation

We have incorporated an inward and outward collaboration framework into our preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation strategies. This approach ensures that we are not only prepared to address internal challenges but also actively engage with external partners, enhancing our collective ability to respond effectively and recover from various hazards.

Our **inward** team is a diverse group. By bringing together these key stakeholders, we can optimize our collective efforts to safeguard the integrity of our organization's operations and the services we deliver to the community, particularly focusing on the well-being of vulnerable residents in the population. This collaborative approach ensures a comprehensive and well-coordinated response to various challenges and emergencies.

## Inward key stakeholder groups

- Emergency management
- Safety officers
- Food & nutrition
- Information technology
- Emergency medical services (EMS)
- Hospital administration
- Energy
- Pharmacy
- Purchasing
- Facilities
- Clinical
- Waste management

Our **outward** collaboration schema involves strong and consistent partnerships. These partnerships extend across local, state, federal, and international organizations and agencies. We maintain active and essential relationships with a wide array of partners. These partners frequently collaborate with us either individually or through legislatively mandated coordination groups, such as the Local Emergency Planning Council.

## Outward key stakeholder groups

- Local & State emergency management
- EMS
- Fire, police, health departments
- Social services agencies
- Environmental agencies
- Utilities



# Interdisciplinary Planning, Oversight, and Evaluation

On a national level, our coordination and collaboration efforts encompass key agencies like the Department of HHS, HHS/ASPR, Veterans Affairs, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Each of these agencies plays a vital role in supporting our preparedness and response capabilities for major events, ensuring a robust and comprehensive approach to emergency management and public safety both in house and within the communities we serve.

Furthermore, Ascension's extensive experience and achievements in handling events before, during, and after their occurrence have provided us with valuable insights to share with our peers. We actively engage in producing after-action reports and participate in requested debriefings and consultations, allowing us to thoroughly examine and discuss our efforts and successes.

We take pride in the fact that both the federal government and other entities frequently seek our best practices. They use our expertise to assist in refining readiness, response, and recovery training and policies that benefit the broader healthcare sector. Our commitment to sharing knowledge and improving emergency preparedness and response underscores our dedication to advancing the field of healthcare emergency management.



*Pictured: Ascension's subsidiary, Medxcel, has a Safety Team located at each site of care. Here is a Medxcel Safety Team reviewing and practicing emergency procedures.*



# **Appendix**

# External Commitments



Ascension continued our commitment to the United Nations' **Race to Zero** campaign signed in FY22. As a signatory and member of the Health Care Climate Council, Ascension pledged to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Our goal is to achieve this 10 years sooner, by 2040.



Ascension also signed the **Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health, Health and Human Services, Health Sector Climate Pledge** in FY22. By signing the pledge, Ascension committed to meet the administration's climate goal of reducing emissions by 50% by 2030, achieving net zero

emissions by 2050 and anticipating the needs of groups in our communities that experience disproportionate risk of climate-related harm. This pledge aligns with Ascension's goals to achieve net zero carbon and zero waste by 2040.



Ascension signed the **Laudato Si' Action Platform** in FY22 in response to Pope Francis' 2015 Encyclical On Care for Our Common Home. The seven-year global program was formed as a collaboration among the Vatican, Catholic organizations and individuals around the world. The platform's seven goals guide actions to redefine and rebuild relationships with each other and our common home, using a Reflect - Act - Evaluate framework.

Ascension submitted a reflection to the Laudato Si' Action Platform in FY23 to demonstrate the connection between the platform's goals and Ascension's Mission to care for our communities. Ascension received a Laudato Si' U.S. Champion honorable mention award from the Catholic Climate Covenant for furthering Laudato Si' goals.

# Next Steps

Ascension's sustainability initiatives will help address the effects of climate change that impact the communities we serve. Ascension's call to environmental sustainability is Mission-driven, social and economical. Our focus is the patient, especially those who are experiencing poverty and vulnerability.

As we understand the factors affecting those who are at an increased risk for negative health impacts associated with climate and climate change, we are able to identify vulnerable populations, educate our communities, and develop action plans to mitigate the impact of intense weather events.



*Pictured: Dell Children's Medical Center North (Austin, Texas).*



For more information, visit [ascension.org/sustainability](https://ascension.org/sustainability)