

HealthFirst

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A Very EPIC Year for Health First and Health First Health Plans

From new hospital groundbreaking, new choppers and lots of ‘stars’- to expansions and ‘top rankings’ - Health First experienced a banner year on the Space Coast.

Rockledge, Fla. – From start to finish, Health First has experienced a banner - some might even say EPIC – year, as its clinicians, associates, leaders and volunteers have strived each day to make the Space Coast a healthier, stronger and more vibrant community.

From numerous prestigious national “best of the best” rankings - to major investments in new facilities, electronic medical record, and trauma ambulance services - Brevard County’s largest healthcare provider and employer has truly made 2024 a year of tremendous impact.

NEWSWEEK’S ‘WORLD’S BEST’

For the fourth straight year, **Health First’s Cape Canaveral Hospital** was named to Newsweek’s list of World’s Best Hospitals 2024.

Newsweek and Statista Inc., the world-leading statistics portal and industry ranking provider, present this prestigious award. The award was announced in February and can be viewed on [Newsweek’s website](#).

With over 300 hospitals in the state of Florida, Cape Canaveral joined just 17 other Florida hospitals – including just three in Central Florida – on the prestigious list. The lists are based on four data sources, including, Recommendations from Medical Experts, results from patient surveys, hospital quality metrics and patient-reported outcome implementation surveys.

The World's Best Hospitals 2024 ranking lists the best hospitals in 30 countries: United States, Germany, Japan, France, Italy, United Kingdom, South Korea, Brazil, India, Spain, Canada, Australia, Mexico, Colombia, Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Malaysia, Thailand, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Israel and Singapore.

The countries were selected based on multiple comparability factors, such as standard of living/life expectancy, population size, number of hospitals and data availability.

HERE WE GROW! HEALTH FIRST BREAKS GROUND ON NEW CAPE CANAVERAL HOSPITAL

In March, Health First broke ground on a new 14-acre location for the Cape Canaveral Hospital and Medical Office Building in Merritt Island. The event was held on March 21, also known as 3-2-1 day.

Scheduled to open in early 2027, the new state-of-the-art Cape Canaveral Hospital project will include:

- 120 private inpatient beds
- 25 Emergency Department treatment rooms
- 6 Operating Rooms
- A new 3-story, 92,000-square-foot Medical Office Building

The hospital is designed for, and will be built to withstand, a Category 4 hurricane. Continuation of care and the potential for evacuation will be evaluated for individual storms, in consultation with state officials.

EPIC ANNOUNCEMENT!

In April, Health First announced the **investment of more than \$160 million** as part of a two-year transformative plan to modernize and transform Brevard County's healthcare experience for patients, health plans members, providers, and care teams.

Health First is partnering with Verona, Wisconsin-based healthcare software vendor Epic to improve the health and wellness of the communities we serve. This ambitious project underscores Health First's mission to deliver high-quality care and services in the most consumer-friendly manner.

"Epic's mission is to help organizations deliver high-quality, personalized care that's easier for everyone. Health First's implementation of Epic systems will result in easier access to medical information so our patients can take control over their healthcare

experience.” said Cheyana Fischer, Health First Chief Clinical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer.

“The investment in the Epic platform will modernize Health First’s technology and improve our ability to support everyone we serve. This will enhance our ability to share data, streamline experience, and provide national best-practice decision support tools. All of these will provide our patients and plan members with quicker access to information they need to manage their health - and make the work of our clinicians and associates more efficient,” Fischer continued.

Epic is nationally recognized for helping its customers achieve high patient/customer experience and satisfaction scores, as well as better outcomes. Becker’s 2023 Hospital CFO report highlights 86 percent of Health Systems with the strongest finances now use Epic, including Geisinger, Mayo Clinic, University of Pittsburgh Medical System, Emory Healthcare, Duke, AdventHealth, Johns Hopkins, and Jefferson Health.

NEWSWEEK TOP VASCULAR AND SPINE SURGEONS

In June, Newsweek named two Health First surgeons to its prestigious “Best Surgeons” lists.

Vascular surgeon [Dr. Irfan Imami](#) was named to Newsweek’s list of [America’s top vascular surgeons](#) for 2024, and [Dr. Paul Keller](#) was named to Newsweek’s list of [top spine surgeons](#) in America for 2024.

“It was a surprise to me,” Dr. Imami said. “I feel privileged and honored to be able to provide this care to our local community and be able to tell patients, you don’t need to travel far. We provide your specialized care right here at Health First health system.”

Newsweek’s **Best Vascular Surgeons** list was compiled based on these factors:

- Patient performance data submitted to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- An online survey of medical experts
- A quality-of-care score from peer surgeons, and
- A weighted consideration of surgeons’ American Board of Surgery certificates.

For many Americans suffering from back pain, finding the right specialist for a specific procedure can make a profound difference in their quality of life. To help narrow that selection process, *Newsweek* and global data intelligence platform Statista partnered to create the first annual ranking of **America’s Best Spine Surgeons**.

Participants were asked to recommend physicians in their own state and in any of the other U.S. states included in the survey. The reason for recommendation (e.g., well-known specialist), the working experience of the participant, and the order of recommendation were taken into account. Participants were also able to specify a “standout” treatment.

The 150 leading spine surgeons, including Dr. Keller, were ultimately recognized – representing the 20 states with the highest numbers of practicing physicians.

In January, Statista [reported that a 2022 survey](#) found that 28 percent of U.S. adults said they had chronic lower back pain. According to [the Cureus Journal of Medical Science](#), every year, almost 1 million U.S. patients undergo surgical procedures on their spine to help treat chronic back and neck pain.

From March to April 2024, Statista invited tens of thousands of medical experts (physicians with knowledge in the respective medical field, managers/administrators and other medical professionals in the respective medical field) to an online survey. The survey was also promoted on [newsweek.com](#).

U.S. NEWS “BEST HOSPITALS”

[Holmes Regional Medical Center](#) was named the No. 1 hospital in Brevard County, and Health First’s four hospitals earned a combined total of 14 “High Performing Specialty” designations as part of [U.S. News’ 2024 “Best Hospitals” report](#).

In addition to being ranked the No. 1 hospital in Brevard County, Holmes Regional Medical Center was ranked No. 17 in the state of Florida – a jump of 5 spots from last year’s No. 22 state ranking (among more than 300 hospitals.)

Holmes Regional Medical Center was recognized for eight High Performing Specialties:

- Aortic Valve Replacement
- Heart Bypass Surgery
- Congestive Heart Failure
- COPD
- Heart Attack
- Hip Replacement
- Leukemia/Lymphoma and Myeloma
- Pneumonia

Palm Bay Hospital was recognized for three High Performing Specialties, including:

- COPD
- Heart Attack

- Hip Replacement

Viera Hospital earned two High Performing Specialty recognitions:

- Diabetes
- Hip Replacement

Cape Canaveral Hospital was recognized for one High Performing Specialty in:

- Heart Attack care

FIVE STARS FOR VIERA HOSPITAL

For the second straight year, [Viera Hospital has been awarded the highly-coveted 5-star overall rating](#) from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Each year, CMS assigns star ratings to U.S. hospitals based on 46 hospital quality measures, which are divided into five quality categories: patient experience, safety of care, mortality, readmission rates, and timely and effective care.

On July 31, CMS released its Overall Hospital Quality Star Ratings for 2024, and Health First's Viera Hospital was one of only 381 U.S. hospitals (and one of only 15 in Florida) to earn the top 5-star rating.

"This accolade is a culmination of all the hard work, dedication, and passion each and every one of our associates brings to the table, day in and day out," said Boring.

"Everything we do at Health First occurs through a narrow lens of providing outstanding medical care and an outstanding patient experience. As we celebrate the opening of a new Labor and Delivery unit that was specifically designed to create and provide an amazing and memorable experience, the timing of the CMS 5-star rating could not be better."

In Fiscal Year 2024, Health First [awarded 15 Wellness Grants totaling more than \\$430,000](#), directly benefiting over 12,450 individuals through these impactful programs.

HEALTH FIRST HEALTH PLANS EXPANDS IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

[Health First Health Plans](#) announced in November expansion of its low-cost health insurance services to four new Central Florida counties.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2025, Health First Health Plans is now available in Hernando, Highlands, Marion, and Sumter, bringing coverage to 14 counties across Central Florida.

“Health First Health Plans has proudly served more than 80,000 members – our friends, family members, neighbors, and associates across the Central Florida and the Space Coast for more than 25 years. It’s no secret that the Central Florida region is one of the nation’s fastest-growing destinations, and as our state grows, we too want to help meet the needs of our communities with services to help keep Florida healthy and well,” said Matt Gerrell, Health First Health Plans president.

And in October, Health First Health Plans announced expansion of its Medicare Advantage plan offerings to customers in **Lake, Orange, and Seminole counties** for 2025.

“As a not-for-profit health plan, we’re excited and honored to expand our Medicare Advantage offerings to customers in Orange, Lake, and Seminole counties for 2025,” said Matt Gerrell, Health First Health Plans President.

“We know identifying and selecting a Medicare Advantage plan can be at times overwhelming. With so much information out there, and so many different plans to choose from, I am pleased to say it doesn’t have to be that way. As a local, not-for-profit health plan that has served our community with pride and strength for nearly 30 years, [Health First’s Medicare Advantage plans](#) include everything Medicare offers, plus many additional benefits – all backed and supported by local, Central Florida-based customer service associates.

TOP 10 PERCENT NATIONWIDE FOR HEALTH FIRST HEALTH PLANS MEDICARE ADVANTAGE!

Health First Health Plans [was named a 4.5 Star plan* by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#) ... ranking in the top 10 percent (91st percentile) of all Medicare Advantage (MA) plans in the U.S.A. – **among nearly 4,000 Medicare Advantage** plans currently available nationwide for individual enrollment.

“I am proud of the legendary work our Health First Health Plans associates have accomplished and being ranked among the top 10 percent of Medicare Advantage plans nationwide for 2025 is a testament to their efforts, said Health First Health Plans President Matt Gerrell.

“This recognition reflects our ongoing dedication to delivering exceptional care, offering accessible and convenient services, providing knowledgeable and friendly customer support, and collaborating with our members to meet their needs. The valuable feedback our members have provided played a pivotal role in achieving this ranking, and we are deeply grateful for their trust and participation. This prestigious recognition is based on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Stars ratings, which evaluate plan performance in areas including quality of care, customer service, health outcomes, and provider office experience,” Gerrell continued.

According to a recent [J.D. Power 2024 U.S. Medicare Advantage Study](#), the most important factors driving customer satisfaction with Medicare Advantage plans are **ease of finding care, low out-of-pocket costs, and provider choice.**

The study underscores that regional Medicare Advantage plans like Health First Health Plans, on average, outperform many other commercial member health plans in overall customer satisfaction.

****Health First Health Plans has been rated 4.5 out of 5 Stars for 2025. Every year, Medicare evaluates plans based on a 5-star rating system.***

GIVING BACK PAYS DIVIDENDS COMMUNITY-WIDE

Health First remains dedicated to building a healthier future for Brevard County. As part of this mission, we proudly collaborate with local organizations to enhance community health and wellness.

Our Wellness Grants focus on addressing disparities highlighted in the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), supporting initiatives that expand access to healthcare, promote physical activity and nutrition for children, and tackle other critical needs.

FLORIDA'S ONLY 5-STAR HOSPICE PROGRAM

Hospice of [Health First](#) in 2024 was named a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) 5-star hospice program, the only licensed hospice [in Florida with the federal agency's top rating.](#)

Hospice of Health First has approximately 275 patients at any time. It maintains 16 inpatient beds between Cape Canaveral Hospital and Health First's William Childs Hospice House. Most patients choose to receive care at home.

"You want the highest quality care for your loved one during this time," says Valerie Kenworthy, Vice President of Outpatient Operations for Community Health Services at Health First. "There are 42 licensed hospice agencies in the state of Florida, but only one that received 5 stars from Medicare, and that is a rating that comes from families of patients in our care."

LEAPFROG 'A' RATING

In November, Health First's Cape Canaveral Hospital has received an 'A' rating from Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade for Fall 2024.

These ratings are based exclusively on patient safety and harm prevention measures – a true testament to the exceptional, dedicated care our associates provide every day to our community. We're proud to support the health and well-being of Brevard today – and well into the future. Health First's three other hospitals – Holmes Regional Medical Center, Viera Hospital and Palm Bay Hospital – all received stellar B grades.

The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade is the only hospital ratings program based exclusively on hospital prevention of medical errors and harms to patients. The grading system is peer-reviewed, fully transparent and free to the public. Grades are updated twice annually, in the spring and fall.

The Leapfrog Group, an independent national watchdog organization, assigns an "A," "B," "C," "D," or "F" grade to general hospitals across the country based on over 30 national performance measures reflecting errors, accidents, injuries and infections, as well as the systems hospitals have in place to prevent harm.

FIRST FLIGHT EXPANDING TO MEET GROWING POPULATION

In December, [Health First](#) officials announced the expansion of its [First Flight](#) air ambulance program with plans to add a second full-time aircraft covering the community in Northern Brevard in early 2025.

Brevard County has long been named among national "best places" rankings for relocation and retirement, and the county continues to attract record numbers of visitors along with new employers.

With the influx of aerospace and defense employment and one of the nation's busiest commercial cruise ports, the tenth-largest county in the state of Florida is expected to continue its growth and development.

First Flight has served as the primary helicopter ambulance service for Brevard County and northern Indian River County for over 35 years, responding to multiple calls each day. As the number of calls increases, Health First is also doubling its air fleet to meet the anticipated growth of emergency and trauma needs.

Holmes Regional Medical Center is the area's only Level II Trauma Center. Along with traumatic injuries, including falls, recreational, motor vehicle, and boating accidents, First Flight also transports cardiac and stroke patients for specialized emergent care to the area's only Joint Commissioned-certified [Thrombectomy Capable Stroke Center](#) and world-class Heart Center at Holmes Regional Medical Center.

“With four hospitals, including the region’s only [Level II Trauma Center](#), Health First is proud and honored to serve Brevard County and surrounding areas with our First Flight air ambulance program,” said Health First President and CEO Terry Forde.

“We know that in a traumatic event – from vehicle or boating accidents to stroke, recreational or work-related injury – more than anything, time matters! The “golden hour” – that ability to quickly respond, treat, and [transport patients to lifesaving care](#) – is absolutely critical to the outcome in traumatic situations. As Brevard County continues to grow, our ability to respond and care for our most vulnerable patients will grow with it. I’m excited about embarking on this next step to serve our community needs at the highest level,” Forde continued.