

From the Tampa Bay Business Journal:

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Health Care

Editor's notebook: Lakeland Regional Health navigates Polk population boom as births hit new highs



Image: Alexis Muellner/TBBJ

A look at the light-drenched lobby of the Carol Jenkins Barnett Pavilion at Lakeland Regional Health.

ALEXIS MUELLNER



By **Alexis Muellner** – Editor, Tampa Bay Business Journal

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It was eye-opening news last month when three counties in the Tampa Bay area landed **in the top 15** of the fastest growing in the country from 2020 to 2023.

For those navigating growth in Polk County, it was stating the obvious. The U.S. Census Bureau ranked Polk No. 5 by adding more than 88,000 residents over the last three years. Lakeland-Winter Haven had the 12th-highest increase.

At Lakeland Regional Health, those numbers can be seen in baby volume. **When it opened** its Carol Jenkins Barnett Pavilion for Women and Children in 2018, it delivered around 3,000 babies annually. In 2023, it was close to 4,500, a nearly 50% increase in six years.

"It's been incredible to see," said system CEO Danielle Drummond. There are also signs of regional demographic change. People at retirement age have historically dominated relocation to Lakeland and Polk County.

"It seems like we're seeing more diversity in those individuals moving here," Drummond said. That is having a direct impact on demand for LRH services. It has also pushed the system to do more messaging around what services and capabilities it has.



Image: Lakeland Regional Health

Danielle Drummond, MS, FACHE ,President and CEO Elect, Lakeland Regional Health

LAKELAND REGIONAL HEALTH

"We have been out there more than we have in the past to ensure that we can continue to tell that great story that we think we have in our community," Drummond said. The system also faces some headwinds, like the physician shortage.

More health care coverage: [Read an excerpt](#) from the Business Journal's recent Power Breakfast conversation with BayCare President and CEO Stephanie Conners.

For primary care and behavioral health, compared with the rest of Florida, Polk has one-third to one-half of the number of providers per capita compared to other markets in the state, the CEO said. That has stayed the same since she arrived in 2019.

THE LIST

Largest Hospitals in Tampa Bay

Licensed beds

| Rank | Prior Rank | Business name |
|------|------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | Tampa General Hospital |
| 2 | 2 | Sarasota Memorial Hospital |
| 3 | 3 | Lakeland Regional Medical Center |

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THE LIST

Largest Hospitals in Florida

Licensed beds

| Rank | Prior Rank | Business name |
|--------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | Jackson Memorial Hospital |
| 2 | 2 | AdventHealth Orlando |
| 3 | 3 | UF Health Shands Hospital |
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