

A Unified Health Equity and Healthcare Access Strategy

Policy Paper

Executive Summary

Daryl Parks has outlined a bold and intentional vision to transition Tallahassee into a healthier, more equitable community where your zip code does not determine your life expectancy. Recognizing that health equity is foundational to both family stability and economic mobility, this comprehensive healthcare strategy seeks to tie citywide medical advancements directly to the kitchen tables of local families, expand neighborhood-based mental health access, and eliminate severe disparities in maternal health outcomes. Operating under the core belief that public health requires proactive, cross-governmental collaboration, this plan aims to replace fragmented services with structured, accountability-driven medical and community partnerships.

Currently, Tallahassee's healthcare landscape requires a fresh, unified approach to deliver tangible results for all residents. Local government and regional institutions have built robust medical infrastructure, yet overall outcomes remain uncoordinated and uneven across demographic lines. Significant health disparities persist, leaving families in historically underserved corridors like Frenchtown, the Southside, and Greater Bond with limited options for local, after-hours care. This baseline stagnation is felt directly across the community, leading to high rates of chronic illness, limited preventative outreach, and an over-reliance on local emergency rooms for behavioral and mental health crises that could be managed more effectively with proactive community support.

A critical component of this landscape is maternal and child health. Secure, accessible, and culturally competent prenatal and postpartum care plays a vital role in community development; when Black mothers face disproportionately high mortality rates statewide, it reflects a severe systemic gap that impacts the structural well-being of local families. Furthermore, a thriving city requires a robust network of neighborhood-based mental health access points. To close these healthcare gaps, Tallahassee must strategically leverage its world-class regional assets, including next-generation medical research anchors, the historic healthcare expansion bridging Florida State University and Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare (TMH-FSU), and deep-rooted community platforms like the Bond Community Health Center and Florida A&M University (FAMU).

The Daryl Parks for Tallahassee Mayor Campaign recognizes that the City of Tallahassee and other key stakeholders have taken meaningful steps in this area. At the same time, Tallahassee's residents deserve an honest acknowledgment that the work is not finished and there remains a lot more work to do. The challenges facing our neighborhoods and our families require more than incremental steps; they demand the kind of sustained, creative leadership that matches the

scale of the need. Progress made is progress worth building on, but it cannot be mistaken for progress complete.

The policy solutions presented in this brief reflect exactly the kind of innovative, community-centered approaches that Daryl Parks will champion as mayor of Tallahassee. Several of the initiatives presented are not new ideas and some have already started. As mayor, Daryl Parks will not only support and advocate for policies like these, but he will also lead their implementation with urgency, accountability, and an unwavering commitment to every resident in every neighborhood across this city. Tallahassee's best days are ahead, and the path to them runs through bold, principled leadership that turns vision into action.

As the current Chair of the Bond Community Health Center Board of Directors, Daryl Parks brings deep, firsthand expertise to navigating Tallahassee's complex healthcare ecosystem. Local government does not replace hospitals or health systems; however, local elected officials are responsible for establishing policies, directing municipal resources, and introducing legislation that protects the public interest and expands care. This unified healthcare strategy merges bold, regional medical partnerships with strict local accountability, ensuring that major health-system expansions seamlessly translate into measurable neighborhood improvements, transparent indigent-care protections, expanded walk-in mental health access, and a safer environment for every mother and child in Tallahassee.

Health Equity and Community Medical Partnerships

The Challenge

Tallahassee's robust medical infrastructure remains uncoordinated and uneven across demographic lines. Families in historically underserved corridors like Frenchtown, the Southside, and Greater Bond face limited options for local, after-hours care. This missing safety net leads to high chronic illness rates and an over-reliance on local emergency rooms for behavioral and medical crises that could be managed more effectively with proactive community support.

The Solution:

Strategically leverage Tallahassee's world-class regional assets, including the TMH-FSU healthcare expansion, the Bond Community Health Center, FAMU, FSU, and TSC, to bring proactive, neighborhood-based preventative care directly to the people.

How to Implement:

- ★ **Build Executive Consensus:** Navigate the complex ecosystem to demand transparent indigent-care protections and ensure public resources yield measurable neighborhood improvements.
- ★ **Attack Community-Wide Disparities:** Scale coordination and collaboration models out of the Bond Community to address prevalent, citywide healthcare gaps.
- ★ **Coordinate Interdisciplinary Training:** Work with FSU Health (the TMH-FSU merged entity), FAMU, FSU, and TSC to provide coordinated training and real-life experiences for all healthcare providers inside local neighborhoods.
- ★ **Establish Policy Protocols:** Use local government authority to establish operational protocols, set municipal resource guidelines, and pass targeted legislation protecting the public interest.

Maternal and Child Healthcare Infrastructure

The Challenge:

Secure, accessible, and culturally competent prenatal and postpartum care plays a vital role in community development. When Black mothers face disproportionately high mortality rates statewide, it reflects a severe systemic gap that impacts the structural well-being of local families, while local families regularly struggle to access postpartum care and preventive resources.

The Solution

Establish a formal, multi-institutional healthcare coalition linking regional medical centers, university researchers, local doulas, and postpartum mental health providers to protect mothers and infants.

How to Implement:

- ★ **Deploy Low-Cost Care Education:** Actively educate expectant mothers on what healthcare and medical services are available at no cost or low cost.
- ★ **Bridge Medicine Access Gaps:** Work with FAMU's College of Pharmacy to inform expectant mothers and at-risk residents on how to access appropriate medicines and prescriptions.
- ★ **Train Early Self-Care Models:** Partner with the FSU Medical School to train, recruit, and inform expectant mothers on self-care and navigating appropriate care systems.
- ★ **Expand Clinical Academic Talent:** Engage the TSC Nursing Department and the FAMU School of Nursing to educate expectant mothers on providing continuous care to their families.
- ★ **Mobilize Grassroots Paternal Support:** Partner with non-profits like Big Brothers Big Sisters and 100 Black Men of Tallahassee to promote personal responsibility and resource access for fathers.
- ★ **Enact the Maternal and Academic Health Equity Ordinance:** Legislate a formal coalition tying city grant funding and procurement contracts to providers implementing verified, culturally competent care.
- ★ **Enact the Regional Healthcare Workforce and Support Act:** Establish an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the FSU College of Medicine Rural Health Program to co-fund clinical education and mobile medical units.

Neighborhood Behavioral Health and Crisis De-escalation

The Challenge:

Neighborhood-based mental health access is severely limited, especially after standard business hours, leading families to rely on emergency rooms because they are unaware of alternative options. Consequently, the Sheriff's Office has become the largest public provider of mental health services through the Detention Center, shifting clinical burdens onto local law enforcement.

The Solution

Expand the city's network of walk-in, after-hours, and family-friendly behavioral health services embedded directly within existing municipal community platforms to manage crises compassionately before they escalate.

How to Implement:

- ★ **Launch "At Your Fingertips" Tech Navigation:** Develop and deploy a citywide mobile phone application to immediately direct residents to appropriate behavioral and medical providers.
- ★ **Optimize the Existing Non-Profit Safety Net:** Formally integrate the capabilities of the Apalachee Center (the largest JCAHO-accredited provider in North Florida), DISC Village, and the TMH Behavioral Health Center.
- ★ **Scale Mobile Response Teams (MRTs):** Deploy Apalachee Center's Mobile Response Teams to respond to active community, school, and law enforcement incidents requiring mental health services.
- ★ **Expand Diversionary Civil Citations:** Broaden DISC Village's award-winning Juvenile Civil Citations model to prevent at-risk youth from establishing a formal arrest record.
- ★ **Secure State Forensic Housing Funds:** Aggressively advocate for state funding to expand forensic and short-stay housing capacity for monitored, long-term patient stabilization.
- ★ **Enact the Municipal Community Hubs Act:** Authorize and fund walk-in mental health services within city-owned infrastructure, such as the Lincoln Center, utilizing dedicated budget lines for evening and weekend staffing.
- ★ **Mandate Compliance and De-escalation Training:** Continuously train schools and law enforcement personnel to ensure strict compliance with Florida law and guarantee optimal behavioral treatment.

Institutional Accountability and Health System Transitions

The Challenge

Major institutional transitions, such as the historic TMH-FSU health-system merger, represent significant regional economic opportunities but risk leaving low-income and uninsured residents without structured medical safety nets.

The Solution

Establish a constructive regulatory and legislative framework designed to fully secure the long-term viability of major mergers, ensuring expansions translate into guaranteed neighborhood-level care.

How to Implement:

- ★ **Enact the Public Interest Health Care Protection Resolution:** Structurally bind city support, infrastructure coordination, and regulatory processes for the TMH-FSU transition to legally binding safeguards.
- ★ **Enforce Safety Net Baselines:** Legislate mandatory, ironclad indigent-care protections and deed restrictions within major health-system transactions to protect vulnerable patients.
- ★ **Implement Enforcement Clawbacks:** Embed strict compliance penalties and clawback provisions into municipal agreements with regional health conglomerates.
- ★ **Mandate Public Reporting:** Require annual, transparent public reporting from health systems regarding community impacts and charity care metrics.
- ★ **Pass the Frontline Health Provider Grant Expansion:** Introduce permanent budget amendments to increase direct city grant pools specifically for grassroots non-profits and mobile medical units operating in high-disparity corridors.

Civic Engagement and Public Feedback Loops

The Challenge

Top-down healthcare plans frequently fail to address the specific, localized medical challenges experienced on a block-by-block level by everyday residents.

The Solution

Transform the strategy into a living, responsive framework driven directly by transparent civic channels and neighborhood voices.

How to Implement:

- ★ **Convene Neighborhood Health Listening Sessions:** Host localized town halls across the city, allowing residents to directly identify specific neighborhood blocks in need of mobile screening units and health fairs.
- ★ **Establish a Grassroots Policy Advisory Council:** Form a structured civic body comprising neighborhood advocates and frontline clinicians to directly shape policy implementation and maintain accountability.