



Shepherd Center

Shepherd Center Community Benefit Report

FY 2024 (April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024)





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Dear Friends,

With five decades of experience, Shepherd Center provides world-class clinical care, research, and family support for people experiencing the most complex conditions, including spinal cord and brain injuries, multi-trauma, traumatic amputations, stroke, multiple sclerosis, and pain. An elite center ranked by *U.S. News* as one of the nation's top hospitals for rehabilitation, Shepherd Center is also recognized as both Spinal Cord Injury and Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems.

While we are proud of these accolades, we also cherish the opportunity to give back to the community that has supported Shepherd Center for 50 years. Beyond the walls of our facility, Shepherd Center remains deeply rooted in our community, extending our reach through initiatives such as charity care, research, health professional education, and various community-building activities.

These efforts underscore our steadfast commitment to treating individual patients and fostering a healthier and more resilient community as a whole. Whether caring for patients and families, educating today's and tomorrow's healthcare professionals, or providing essential programming throughout the community, we're on a mission to invest in our community for well beyond another 50 years.



This document outlines the community benefits we offer by the numbers.

You can learn more about our mission and the work we do to achieve it at shepherd.org.

With gratitude,

Jamie Shepherd, MBA, MHA, FACHE
President and CEO, Shepherd Center

About Us

Founded in 1975, Shepherd Center provides world-class clinical care, research, and family support for people experiencing the most complex conditions, including spinal cord and brain injuries, multi-trauma, traumatic amputations, stroke, multiple sclerosis, and pain. An elite center recognized as both Spinal Cord Injury and Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems, Shepherd Center is ranked by *U.S. News* as one of the nation's top hospitals for rehabilitation. In fact, with 152 beds, which includes a 10-bed Intensive Care Unit, we are one of the largest neurorehabilitation hospitals in the United States. Our mission is to help people with a temporary or permanent disability caused by injury or disease rebuild their lives with hope, independence and dignity, advocating for their full inclusion in all aspects of community life while promoting safety and injury prevention.

Objective

Patients come to Shepherd Center from across the United States and the world seeking the best care and resources unique from other hospitals treating patients with similar injuries. Community benefit funding partially supports various value-added programs and services such as recreation therapy, animal-assisted therapy, patient outings, chaplaincy, assistive technology, peer support, back-to-school programs, and family programs. We also offer specialized programs tailored to adolescents, patients with dual diagnoses (both brain and spinal cord injuries), patients on ventilators, and patients with low-level brain injuries.

Patient-Centered Care

Shepherd Center focuses on patient-centered care and offers a broad continuum of care and exceptional quality that is unique in the setting of a rehabilitation hospital. Our continuum of care includes Intensive Care Unit (ICU), inpatient care, Day Program, outpatient programs, research programs, and more. Our value-added, or "community benefit," programs provide our patients with the resources to re-learn activities of daily living and achieve the goals they have set for themselves post-injury. Those goals include returning to home, school, and work as independently as possible. They also include regaining the ability to enjoy life through social events, hobbies and leisure activities, as well as providing for themselves and their family. While these value-added programs help our patients restore their hope and rebuild their lives, they often are not reimbursed by insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid. We believe these programs are essential to a patient's successful recovery and directly contribute to our much-greater-than-average clinical outcomes that lead to greater independence for the patient. We offer these programs with the generous support of thousands of donors annually and from any excess revenue the hospital earns through conservative financial management.

Shepherd Center defines community benefit as a planned, organized, and measured approach to services and activities that specifically address the healthcare needs of people with spinal cord and brain injury, multiple sclerosis, chronic pain, other neuromuscular diseases, as well as the family or loved ones impacted. Patients at Shepherd Center get more than medical care, they also receive evaluation and medical treatment to rehabilitation and lifelong support programs -- that extends back to their communities. Our patient population has unique needs that are typically under-served, which makes Shepherd an important lifeline and resource for our patients throughout their life. Shepherd Center's community includes current patients and their families, as well as former patients and their families.



Man on a Mission

A Minnesota native, Robby Barbieri fell in love with Nashville, Tennessee, while attending Vanderbilt University, playing football, and earning his undergraduate degree in economics and a master's degree in finance. After graduation, he had been working in finance in the healthcare industry for several years when he sustained an incomplete C4-C5 spinal cord injury in a car crash early in 2022.

Robby went first to Vanderbilt University Hospital, where he spent three weeks in the ICU. When he arrived at Shepherd, he still used a ventilator to assist with breathing. “Prior to Shepherd, I was having a hard time coming off the vent. It was an agonizing process. I think I was completely off the vent two and a half weeks after I got to Shepherd. I remember drinking water and eating for the first time, and it was the greatest thing in the world for me at the time,” Robby recalls.

While in Shepherd’s Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program, Robby tried to soak up all the education offered, learning to care for his skin, working on a bowel and bladder program, and exploring assistive technology options. “The adaptive tech gave me a lot of hope because I realized I can work again,” Robby explains. “Now, I use a lot of technology to make my life work.”



Once he returned home, Robby began to feel the pressure of his mortgage and medical and caregiver expenses. He felt ready to rejoin the workforce. That’s when he discovered another obstacle to building the life he hoped for. Tennessee was one of a handful of states without a Medicaid buy-in program. A buy-in program allows participants to earn income and have assets while paying a premium to Medicaid. Because no such buy-in program existed as part of TennCare, Tennessee’s Medicaid program, Robby faced income limits of \$2,829 per month and asset limits of \$2000 to receive Medicaid — insurance coverage essential for his care.

Through a former coach and mentor, Robby met Josh Basile, a disability lawyer, and discovered a mission that would occupy the next several months of his life and change how he views himself. Robby learned that Josh, who also has tetraplegia, has a job, bought a house with his partner, and has two kids.

“After the first conversation with Josh, so much hope came into my life,” Robby says. “I thought a lot of those life events were unattainable for me because of my injury. Our conversation lit the fire,” he explains.

To change the law that made him feel he had to choose between work and health insurance, Robby spent months making connections, building a task force, and drumming up support. He started a nonprofit, Music City Wheels, to highlight the issue. He worked with the Tennessee Disability Coalition,



which connected him with Tennessee State Rep. Darren Jernigan, who also has a spinal cord injury and supported Robby's efforts. Robby reached out to experts to help him make the case for changing the law by gathering data and crunching numbers for the budget. He also worked, alongside others, to get sponsors for the bill in the Tennessee House and Senate. “

I feel like it's every human's right to be able to earn income and also get the health care that they need,” Robby says. “This is about affirming the dignity and potential of every Tennessean, empowering us not just to survive, but to thrive.”

All the hard work paid off, and on April 24, 2024, with sponsors Senator Bo Watson and Representative Tim Hicks, the TennCare for Working

Individuals with Disabilities Act became law, allowing qualified individuals with disabilities to pay a premium to access Medicaid's long-term support services, even if their income exceeds the current Medicaid eligibility requirements.

“This bill marks a historic step forward,” he says. “It ensures that individuals with disabilities no longer have to choose between maintaining health coverage and pursuing their career aspirations or personal happiness, such as marriage. As someone who has lived through the limitations of the previous system, this change isn't just policy to me, it's personal. It represents a future where disabilities do not define our capacities to contribute, to succeed, and to build lives of fulfillment,” he explains. And Robby is enjoying the benefits of his advocacy. He recently started a fulltime job in corporate finance with NuMotion, a wheelchair and mobility equipment company.

He's continuing his advocacy work, connecting with organizations in Louisiana and Utah to improve laws surrounding working with a disability.



“I never thought advocacy would be a big part of my life,” Robby says. “But I really like it — it kind of makes everything make sense. I always want to be in this disability arena, giving back.”

Advocacy Milestones

Founding board member Dave Webb represented Georgia in President Jimmy Carter's White House Conference on the Handicapped, which aimed to create an agenda for the country as it related to people with disabilities



1970s

1987



Shepherd Center officially creates an advocacy program

Advocacy became part of Shepherd Center's mission statement



1988

1996



Shepherd Center plays a pivotal role in bringing the Paralympic Games to Atlanta and shaping the future of Paralympics. The Paralympic Torch Run ended at Shepherd Center to start the 1996 Games

Shepherd Center was named a "Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion" by the *American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)* and *Disability:IN*



2021

2024



Recognizing Shepherd's commitment to the disability community, the Caravan for Disability Freedom and Justice made a stop in Shepherd Center's Anna and Hays Mershon Secret Garden for an afternoon of education





In 2024, Shepherd Center invested over
\$17 million in our communities.

\$4.3M
Charity
Care

\$4.2M
Community
Health
Improvement
Services

\$2.2M
Community
Benefit
Operations

\$36K
Community-
Building
Activities

\$121K
Subsidized
Health
Services

\$608K
Education

Experts in Neurorehabilitation

This report focuses on the following areas of impact:

- 1 Community-Building Activities:** programs that provide opportunities to address the root causes of health problems in our community.
- 2 Health Professional Education:** programs that provide scholarships or funding for professional education.
- 3 Financial and In-Kind Contributions:** Services donated to individuals or the community at large.
- 4 Subsidized Health Services:** Clinical services that meet a community need that are provided despite a financial loss.
- 5 Community Health Improvement:** Activities carried out to improve community health and do not generate inpatient or outpatient bills.

Community-Building Activities

These are programs that provide opportunities to address the root causes of health problems in our community.



Housing • 800 patients/clients served

Provides temporary housing at no cost for families of newly-injured rehabilitation patients who live more than 60 miles from Atlanta.



RESCUE • 75 patients/clients served

A program that provides home alert labels and education for people with physical and/or cognitive limitations who find themselves in emergency situations.



Injury Prevention • 2,530 patients/clients served

Provides materials and expert instruction to school, employers, and local organizations on simple steps to preventing catastrophic injury..

Health Professional Education

These are programs that provide scholarships or funding for professional education.



Nurse Extern Program • 17 patients/clients served

Trains new nurses in the specialized field of spinal cord and brain injury rehabilitation.



Nurse Residency Program • 89 patients/clients served

Trains medical residents in specialized fields.



Residency Program • 375 patients/clients served

Trains medical residents in the specialized field of spinal cord and brain injury rehabilitation.

Financial and In-Kind Contributions

These are services donated to individuals or the community at large.



Shepherd Center Wheelchair Division of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Peachtree Road Race • 1 patients/clients served

A program partner event that helps raise awareness and educate the general public about services available to them.

Subsidized Health Services

These are clinical services that meet a community need that are provided despite a financial loss.



Shepherd Pathways • 788 patients/clients served

A community-based rehabilitation program for adolescents and adults recovering from brain injury, offering various therapy programs that focus on increased independence and community integration.



Acquired Brain Injury • 450 patients/clients served

Donor-restricted funds help offset the cost of therapy and to purchase patient therapy equipment for patients who have sustained a traumatic brain injury.



Hagemeyer Fund • 14 patients/clients served

An endowment established by former patient Bob Hagemeyer, provides funding for counseling and specialized equipment for in Shepherd's outpatient program..



Animal-Assisted Therapy • 2,700 patients/client sessions

Utilizes specially trained animals to assist patients with physical therapy, motor skills, strength, and endurance.



SCI Program Fund • 300 patients/clients served

Donor restricted funds help offset the cost of patient therapy for patients, and to purchase patient therapy equipment for people who have sustained a spinal cord injury.



Horticultural Therapy • 1,232 patients/client sessions

Trains patients to use adaptive tools for gardening as well as floral arranging and craft use.



The Travis Roy Get Back in the Game Initiative • 130 patients/clients served

Provides patients with a “Trav-Pack”, a package of items and tools that aims to help inspire patients and enhance their lives.



Center for Assistive Technologies • 1,622 patients/clients served

Provides patients with the latest high tech tools and equipment so they can regain independence after a neurological injury or condition.



Patient Equipment • 47 patients/clients served

Provides vital equipment such as wheelchairs or home modifications to patients with limited financial resources.



Andee's Army • 47 patients/clients served

Provides financial assistance to children and youth during all phases of inpatient care and rehabilitation, as well as their transition from hospital to outpatient rehabilitation and whom-life following a brain or spinal injury.

Community Health Improvement

These are activities carried out to improve community health that are subsidized by the healthcare organization and do not generate inpatient or outpatient bills, although they may involve a nominal patient fee and/or sliding scale fee.



Alias Family Sports Teams • 116 patients/clients served

Provide operational, travel, and equipment to our adaptive sports teams.



SHARE Military Initiative • 173 patients/clients served

Provides evidence-based rehabilitation for veterans, service members, and first responders who have traumatic brain injuries and mental health concerns at no cost to the client.



Complex Concussion Clinic • 328 patients/clients served

Offers comprehensive and patient-centered rehabilitation and services to treat concussions and assists patients in returning to work, school, and play sooner and with fewer long-term complications.



Wellness/Promotion Program • 150 patients/clients served

Provides accessible gym and wellness programs to former patients and community members focused on improving strength, endurance, and wellness through exercise programs.



Adolescent Program • 38 patients/clients served

Provides teen-specific activities such as group activities, games and sports, as well as community outings to familiar venues such as the mall, restaurants and sporting events to keep our teenage patients motivated and help overcome social fears associated with their new disabilities.



Transportation • 1,585 patients/clients served

Provides transportation to patients and families who participate in the Shepherd Pathways Day Program, as well as those patients and families who stay in our off-site apartments. In addition, transportation is provided for patient/family outings, and other community outings.



Recreation Therapy • 1,802 patients/clients served

Offers a wide-array of sports and leisure activities for our patients and others with disabilities. Recreation Therapy encourages teamwork, builds self-confidence, and improves overall quality of life.



Vocational Services • 505 patients/clients served

Provides current and former patients with vocation evaluation, counseling, and job placement services. It also partners with employers and community resources to increase employment for people with disabilities..



MS General Support • 8,200 patient/clients served

Provides patients with multiple sclerosis (MS), suspected MS or related disorders, assistance with housing, utilities, medical equipment, medical expenses and any other miscellaneous requests that may be needed.



Chaplaincy • 3,217 patient/clients served

As a vital part of Shepherd's interdisciplinary healthcare team concept, specially-trained chaplains provide counsel, support, and faith materials to patients and families of all faiths and conduct worship services at the hospital.



Noble Learning Resource Center • 1,348 patient/clients served

Shepherd Center's library is the South's only consumer health library devoted to spinal cord and brain injuries and related conditions. Containing a substantial book and audio/visual collection, the library also offers various resources and media including medical books and journals, educational DVDs, literature databases, and computers with internet access for library patrons.



Ambulance Fund • 32 patient/clients served

Allows patients to access emergency transport services.



Patient Assistant Fund • 222 patient/clients served

Provides direct assistance to patients and their families to cover daily living and non-hospital expenses that are not covered by insurance.



MS Wellness and Rehab • 329 patient/clients served

Provides a clinical environment for studies on multiple sclerosis (MS) disease-modifying therapies, rehabilitation, symptom management, and patient education.



Recreation Therapy Outdoor Program • 1,357 patient/clients served

Provides outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, camping, kayaking, boating and ATV riding to patients post injury.



Transition Support • 380 patient/clients served

Provides education, guidance, and support to patients and their families upon discharge to home in order to improve health and safety outcomes and increase patient and family independence and autonomy.

Community Partnerships are integral to the success of Shepherd Center.

Shepherd Center has more than 200 industry and academic partnerships to advance research and innovation. Sharing knowledge is the key to making progress on behalf of the people we serve. We collaborate with leading universities, including Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia to advance brain and spinal cord injury medicine and technology. Shepherd researchers also collaborate with international corporate technology partners to test and enhance new assistive and therapeutic technologies, including robotic devices to help restore function and assist with walking. Our partners understand our consumers are extremely underserved and need as much support as they can receive in order to achieve the fullest level of recovery and quality of life.

Our partners include, but are not limited to:





**Shepherd Center Recognized as a Disability Equality Index
Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion.**



**Hospital is a top scorer for
disability inclusion in the
workplace.**



With five decades of experience, Shepherd Center provides world-class clinical care, research, and family support for people experiencing the most complex conditions, including spinal cord and brain injuries, multi-trauma, traumatic amputations, stroke, multiple sclerosis, and pain. An elite center ranked by U.S. News as one of the nation's top hospitals for rehabilitation, Shepherd Center is also recognized as both Spinal Cord Injury and Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems. Shepherd Center treats thousands of patients annually with unmatched expertise and unwavering compassion to help them begin again.



Shepherd Center

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