

**STATE AGENCY ACTION REPORT**  
**ON APPLICATIONS FOR CERTIFICATE OF NEED**

**A. PROJECT IDENTIFICATION**

1. Applicant/CON Action Number

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco/CON application #10772**

5771 Roosevelt Boulevard, 610  
Clearwater, Florida 33760-3413

Authorized Representative: Jonathan D. Fleece, Esq., CEO  
(941) 552-7564

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida/CON application #10773**

201 South Biscayne Boulevard, Suite 400  
Miami, Florida 33131

Authorized Representative: William Mark Hayes, II  
(678) 448-7592

2. Service District/Subdistrict

Service Area 5A (Pasco County)

**B. PUBLIC HEARING**

A public hearing was not held or requested regarding the proposed projects.

**Letters of Support**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** provides excerpts of its support letters in various sections of CON application #10772. The application's Exhibit 1 includes letters of support from:

- Hospitals
  - BayCare Health System - Lou Galdieri, Co-Chief Operating Officer (West Central Florida), Pasco County
  - St. Joseph's Children's Hospital (BayCare Kids)
    - Brooke Bavinger, MD & Stephen Mayper, MD – Medical Directors

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- Trisha Larkin, MD, MBA - Pediatric Neuro-Oncology
- University of South Florida – Michelle Blanco, MD, Tampa General Pediatric Complex Care Program, Assistant Director and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics
- Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities
  - Life Care Center of New Port Richey, Lee Edmister, Administrator
  - Vitality Senior Living Hudson, Lara Kelley, Executive Director
- Physicians, Clinics and Home Health Agencies
  - Wael Faltas, MD, Clinic Time Internal Medicine/Primary Care
  - Patrick A Cambier, MD, Interventional Cardiac Consultants, PLC
  - Daniel Rodriguez, MD, Florida Medical
  - Clinic Good Samaritan Health Clinic of Pasco, Mike Singer, Executive Director
  - Paul Lallanilla, President-Owner, Right at Home – Pasco
  - Deanna Arnold, Business Development Manager, Bayshore Home Care
  - Yvette Guzman, DNP, CEO, Olive Health, LLC
- Business, Education and Government Organizations and Leaders
  - Kathleen Van Eerden, Dean, College of Health Professions, Saint Leo University
  - Beckie Halaska, CDP, NPRA, Senior Placement Specialist, Florida Senior Living Specialists
  - Lanie Shirey, Executive Director, Hospice of Marion/Nancy Renyhart Dementia Education Program
  - Trang Chitalone, MPH, Administrator, Florida Dept of Health – Pasco
  - Vicki Wiggins, President and CEO, Greater Zephyrhills Chamber of Commerce
  - Jennifer Watts, Chief Executive Officer, Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County
  - Ann Marie Winter Area, Executive Director, Agency on Aging - Pasco/Pinellas
  - Ryan Abremski, Board President, Pasco Aging Network
  - Lindsey Langley-Liboreiro, Senior Executive Director, American Cancer Society
  - Rishi Patel, PharmD, MBA, AAHIVP, President & CEO, CAN Community Health
  - Vicki Kammeier, Blackbean Software

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- Religious Organizations
  - Christine Long, Executive VP and Chief Programs Officer, Metropolitan Ministries
  - Dr. Sandra E. Braham, President & CEO, Gulf Coast JFCS, (Jewish Outreach)
- And six letters from Pasco County residents.

### **VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)**

states that it will pursue inpatient agreements within the service area with existing hospitals or skilled nursing facilities and has received a letter of support from Hillside Health and Rehab Center

The application's Tab 42 includes letters of support from:

#### **Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities**

- Hillside Health and Rehabilitation Center, John Masterson, Administrator, Zephyrhills (Pasco County)
- Nursing and Rehabilitation Center Of New Port Richey, Veronica Lugo, Director of Social Services, New Port Richey (Pasco County)
- Brookdale Senior Living (Brookdale New Port Richey), Rhonda Livak, Executive Director, ALF, New Port Richey (Pasco County)
- The Pavilion of New Port Richey, Nina Kates, Director of wellness, ALF, New Port Richey (Pasco County)
- Aurora Gardens Care, Stasha Thomas, Executive Director, ALF, New Port Richey (Pasco County)
- Dade City Health and Rehabilitation Center, Marybeth Lumbra, Social Services Director, Dade City (Pasco County)

#### **Physicians, Clinics and Home Health Agencies**

- Wesley Wilson, PA-C, Physicians Assistant, Premier Community HealthCare, Zephyrhills (Pasco County)
- Dr. Nkume Sobe Jr., DPT, CEO, SobeRehab, (serves Hillsborough and Pasco County residents) Tampa (Hillsborough County)
- Makeba Melendez ARNP, Lisbeth Calderon and Magda Carrasquillo -Office Managers, MedHealth Clinical, Zephyrhills (Pasco County)
- Dawn Carter, Medical Assistant, Elite Care Health Centers, New Port Richey (Pasco County)

#### **Business, Education and Government Organizations and Leaders**

- Danny Burgess, State Senator, The Florida Senate, District 23 (Hillsborough, Pasco, Polk Counties)

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- Ed Hooper, Florida State Senate, District 21 (Pasco, Pinellas Counties)
- Brad Yeager, Florida House of Representatives, District 56 (Pasco County)
- Gary Bradford, Pasco County Commissioner, District 4
- Seth Weightman, Pasco County Commissioner, District 2

**Out of Service Area Notable Support**

- Solaris Healthcare – Celebration, Diane MacSweeney, Kissimmee (Osceola County)
- Beach House Assisted Living and Memory Care, Bonnie Berkman, ALF, Naples (Collier County)
- Dr. Sangeeta Hans, MD, Chief Quality Officer, Better Health Group, VIPcare, Lady Lake (Lake County)
- Matthew Stephen, CEO, Phoenix Solutions Group, Courtesy Labs, Apopka (Orange County)
- Courtney Burt, Vice President of Community Impact/Tampa Bay, American Heart Association (Hillsborough County)
- Teresa Harbour, RN, MBA, MHA, COO, Community Health Accreditation Partner (CHAP), Arlington, VA

**C. PROJECT SUMMARY**

The applicants are proposing to establish a new hospice program in SA 5A in response to published need.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** also referenced as Suncoast, Empath Pasco, or the applicant, is a licensed hospice provider in SA 6A. The applicant's parent company, Empath Health operates licensed hospice programs in SAs 3B, 5B, 6A, 6B, 6C, 8A, 8D, 9B and 10.

Suncoast expects issuance of license and initiation of service during October 2024.

The applicant proposes \$799,670 in total project costs, which includes equipment, development, and start-up costs.

Suncoast proposes to condition the award of this CON application upon the following:

**1. Development of Disease-Specific Programming**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will deploy a heart failure program, known as Empath Cardiac CareConnections Program, for residents of Pasco County who are in late stages of disease and in need of hospice care.
- b. Empath Hospice of Pasco will develop disease-specific programming for Pasco County patients suffering from Alzheimer's Disease, known as Empath Alzheimer's/ Dementia CareConnections Program.
  - Empath Hospice of Pasco will implement a Music in Caregiving program for Pasco County hospice patients and will employ a 0.5 FTE Board-Certified Music Therapist by Year 2.
  - In partnership with the Nancy Renyhart Center for Dementia Education, Empath Hospice of Pasco will provide education, caregiver training, support and resources in pursuit of quality of care for those living with dementia.
    - Services available include: Dementia Caregiving Training Workshops, Memory Café's, Virtual Dementia Tour for healthcare professionals, first responders and members of the community, Dementia presentations and Home Consultations for caregiver education and support.
- c. Empath Hospice of Pasco will deploy disease-specific programming for Pasco County patients suffering from end-stage pulmonary disease, known as Empath Pulmonary CareConnections Program.
  - Empath Hospice will assure a Licensed Respiratory Therapist will be part of the Interdisciplinary Care Team for patients suffering from end stage pulmonary disease.

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- d. Empath Hospice of Pasco will deploy an end-stage renal disease program, known as Empath Renal CareConnections Program, for residents of Pasco County who are in late stages of disease and in need of hospice care.
- e. Empath Hospice of Pasco will deploy a comprehensive wound care and ostomy program for residents of Pasco County who require wound care as a complementary program to their end-stage disease.
  - The program will be both virtual and in-person.
  - The program will include expanded training for nursing and staff members including wound care curriculum and nurse/leadership competency assessments annually
- f. Empath Hospice of Pasco will work with physician specialists and specialty groups within the area related to each disease area to increase education and outreach in an effort to increase hospice utilization within these disease categories.
  - Specific activities will include at least two workshops annually presenting the benefits of hospice for End-Stage Cardiovascular, Pulmonary and Renal Disease, as well as Alzheimer's and dementia. The workshops will be either virtual or in person and open to all area physicians.
- g. Empath Hospice of Pasco will partner with various organizations such as the American Cancer Society to conduct joint community educational programs about chronic illness, Advance Care Planning, grief, and hospice care.
  - Empath Hospice of Pasco will designate \$10,000 annually to these organizations to assist with the costs of printed materials, as well as social and digital media, as part of this partnership.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reporting of disease-specific patient volumes and number of annual workshops to AHCA.**

**2. Development of Resources for Rural and Low-Income Populations**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will utilize a vehicle to conduct mobile outreach activities in Pasco County. The mobile care unit is known as "Empath Mobile Access to Care".
- The mobile outreach unit (referenced in condition 2(a)) is staffed by a bilingual LPN and a bilingual BSW and will visit numerous areas (to be determined), throughout Pasco County.
  - The mobile unit is equipped with the required technology to facilitate telehealth and videoconferencing sessions to reach those without internet access.
  - Empath Hospice of Pasco will work with the Florida Department of Health (Pasco County), as well as Metropolitan Ministries, Good Samaritan Health Clinic of Pasco and the Homeless Coalition of Pasco to develop a collaborative program that will deploy Empath's mobile care unit to various locations throughout the county. The goal will be to assist patients with advanced illness navigate the health care system, link them to the right level of care at the right time, and identify patients who are medically eligible for hospice earlier in their disease process.
  - Empath Hospice of Pasco will implement the use of virtual reality technology (Rendever), which has been shown in many studies to successfully alleviate and reduce symptoms such as pain and anxiety in addition to decreasing feelings of isolation by allowing them to engage in the outside world.
  - Empath Hospice of Pasco will provide up to \$25,000 annually for five years to Metropolitan Ministries. The funding will assist Metropolitan Ministries in providing clinical support to enhance identification of homeless persons in Pasco County who are medically eligible for hospice care.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reporting the expenditures of the funds and reports presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the programs, as well as patient visits.**

**3. Development of Ethnic Community-Specific Programming**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will deploy a mobile outreach unit ("Empath Mobile Access to Care") that will visit designated locations in Pasco County on a routine basis to offer specialized programming and education seminars, Spanish-speaking care teams, Spanish language educational materials, caregiver support and Spanish language bereavement counseling and support groups.
- b. Empath Hospice of Pasco will organize a General Care Council that will include members from the community to provide feedback and guidance with regards to outreach to their communities.
- c. By year 2, Empath Hospice of Pasco will utilize a minimum of two Community Partnership Specialists to conduct community engagement activities, facilitate education, and to cultivate trust and partnerships within the African American, Hispanic, and Veterans communities.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by reporting the expenditures of the funds for the vehicle as well as annual reporting of calendar/schedule of activities for the mobile unit care council meeting dates and Community Partnership Specialists visits to cultivate community partners.**

**4. Development of Specialized Pediatric Programming**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will develop a Children's Community Program in Pasco County including Pediatric Hospice, a perinatal loss doula program, and a Partners in Care (PIC) program.
- b. The Pediatric Hospice program will offer an expanded hospice benefit for patients up to age 21, including care from a specialized pediatric staff.

- c. Additional programs will focus on longer term services for patients who may not otherwise qualify for hospice such as those with developmental conditions, cancers, chronic illnesses, or brain injury that shorten lives and place special demands on families.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the program.**

**5. Development of Strategies to Increase Hospital Discharges to Hospice**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will deploy dedicated facility teams to increase discharge from hospitals directly to hospice care. The dedicated teams will consist of a Registered Nurse, a Patient Care Concierge and a Professional Liaison.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the program.**

**6. Development of a Continuum of Care Navigation Program**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will deploy telehealth technology within the proposed mobile outreach unit, in order to link the bilingual LPN and BSW staffing the unit to Empath Health's care navigators and other resources in the community and enhance the care navigation function they will provide.
- b. Empath Hospice of Pasco will recruit a minimum of two Community Partnership Specialists over the first two years of operation to provide outreach to the community and to build a network of community partners in order to enhance continuum of care navigation.
- c. Empath Hospice of Pasco will recruit a minimum of two Professional Liaisons in the first year of operation, increasing to four Liaisons in year two, as needed. The Liaisons will provide outreach to clinical partners in order to develop a network of clinical resources to enhance continuum of care navigation.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the programs.**

**7. Development of a Program to address Transportation Challenges for Rural Areas**

- a. To address transportation challenges and disadvantages, Empath Hospice of Pasco will purchase and provide GOPASCO transportation vouchers to distribute to clients that were identified as having chronic or advanced illnesses requiring transportation assistance. Empath Hospice of Pasco will also provide vouchers for other transportation vendors to provide a variety of available resources to address transportation challenges in all areas, particularly those that do not have readily available access to public transportation. Empath Hospice of Pasco will designate \$10,000 annually to assist in transportation challenges.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the program.**

**8. Development of a Specialized Veterans Program**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will develop a specialized veteran's program in Pasco County. The program will focus on improving end-of-life care for veterans.
- b. Empath Hospice of Pasco will plan a specialized veterans mental health awareness program including virtual and in-person programming for grief support, community connections, knowledge of services and to honor their service.
- c. Empath Hospice of Pasco will pursue We Honor Veterans Level 3 Partnership Certification within the first two years of operation in Pasco County.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the programs.**

**9. Interdisciplinary Palliative Care Consult Partnerships**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will offer hospitals, ALFs, SNFs and Physician Groups in Pasco Counties the opportunity to partner with Empath Health in the provision of interdisciplinary palliative care consult services - both inpatient and community-based.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by an annual report after the first year. Presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the palliative consult service teams.**

**10. Dedicated Quality-of-Life Funds for Patients and Families**

- a. The applicant commits a minimum budget of \$2,500 annually per interdisciplinary team for the provision of quality-of-life funds for hospice patients and families. These funds are designated to assist with financial needs in order to provide a safe environment for patients or to provide meaningful end-of-life experiences.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured through reporting quality-of-life fund results and uses annually to AHCA for the first two years of operation.**

**11. Community Advisory Council**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will provide access to the Community Advisory Council to be comprised of residents reflective of the community. The purpose of the council is to provide input, feedback and recommendations about the needs of the Pasco communities which will be used in future program development.

**Proposed Measure. This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA detailing the number of Pasco County additions to the Community Advisory Council.**

**12. Physician/Provider Advisory Committee**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will provide access to the Physician/Provider Advisory Committee to include local physicians, discharge planners and other clinical partners in Pasco County. The purpose of the committee is to assist in program oversight new program development, and to develop

strategies to increase awareness and utilization of hospice services for patients nearing the end-of-life.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA showing the number of Pasco County physician/provider additions to the Physician/Provider Advisory Council.**

**13. Family Advisory Council**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will provide access to the Family Advisory Council to be comprised of family members of patients of Empath Pasco who have passed away. The purpose of the committee is to provide a mechanism by which family members can provide feedback to the applicant regarding the caregiving process and assist in assessment/improvement of current programs from the patient and family standpoint, as well as development of new programs that will aid both the patient and family during the hospice care episode and beyond.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA showing the number of Pasco County additions to the Family Advisory Council.**

**14. Development of an Interfaith Community Advisory Council**

- a. Within one year, Empath Hospice of Pasco will develop an Interfaith Community Advisory Council which will include clergy and lay representatives from a wide variety of religious and cultural groups. The goals of the Council will be:
  - Communicate community needs
  - Offer cultural and religious perspectives
  - Promote spiritual and community engagement
  - Increase collaboration between faith communities and Empath Hospice
  - Educate the community on the programs and services offered by Empath Hospice

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the Interfaith Community Advisory Council.**

**15. Implementation of Open Access Model of Care**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will accept patients into hospice who are still receiving complex medical treatments, or who are still working through difficult end-of-life conversations and situations, in order to give earlier access to palliative care and hospice support. Eligible patients include:
- Patients with a terminal illness who are felt to have 6 months or less to live and who want to receive the kind of palliative and supportive care only Empath Pasco can give.
  - Patients who continue to receive medical treatments as part of their Goals of Care.
  - Patients with complex psychosocial needs who are still working through difficult end of life conversations and situations.
  - Patients on ventilator support who have made the decision to stop assisted ventilation.

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by reports presented to AHCA detailing the progress of the development of the program.**

**16. Provision of Value-Added Services Beyond the Medicare Hospice Benefit:**

- a. Empath Hospice of Pasco will provide numerous programs and services that are outside the scope of the Medicare Hospice Benefit, including:
- Integrative Medicine and Palliative Arts modalities
  - Specialized Bereavement Programs
  - Caregiver Coffee Breaks
  - Empathy Calls
  - Vigil Volunteer Program
  - End of Life Doula training available for Volunteers
  - Volunteer programming that can be available to school and corporate groups, and flexible time needs
  - Specialized Infusion Services
  - Clinical Pharmacy Consultations
  - Dr. Direct Program
  - Rendeвер Virtual Reality

**Proposed Measure: This will be measured by annual reports presented to AHCA detailing the implementation of the programs.**

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** is an existing for-profit Florida hospice provider, parented by CHEMMED Corporation, a publicly traded company. VITAS provides hospice services in SAs 1, 2A, 2B (licensed 4/17/24), 3A, 3C, 3E, 4A, 4B, 6B, 7A, 7B, 7C, 8B, 8C, 9B, 9C, 10 and 11.

VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida ("VITAS") is a wholly owned subsidiary of VITAS Healthcare Corporation ("VHC") headquartered in Miami, Florida. VITAS is a wholly owned subsidiary of CHEMED Corporation, a publicly traded company.

The applicant expects issuance of license September 1, 2024, and initiation of service October 1, 2024.

Total project costs are projected to be \$1,366,639 and include equipment, project development and start-up costs.

Pursuant to project approval, VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida offers the following (19) Schedule C conditions

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida  
Conditions of the Application**

As it relates to the conditions of this application, VITAS has not listed services and procedures required by state and federal law because VITAS understands the conditions in a CON application are intended to be actions that the applicant commits to voluntarily. VITAS will comply with all state and federal laws and with all the reporting requirements and time frames in Chapters 59C-1.013 and 59C-1.021, F.A.C. Additionally, VITAS commits to delivering the following services to meet operational/programmatic conditions described below.

**Special Programs:**

**VITAS Cardiac Care Program**

The age-adjusted death rate from heart disease is the leading cause of death for residents of Pasco County. Additionally, at least two hospitals in Service Area 5A have a hospice utilization rate for cardiac patients that is less than the statewide average. At least four Service Area 5A hospitals have a hospice average length of stay that is shorter

than the statewide average. These statistics are indicators of late referrals and a need for education. These metrics can be improved by targeted, diagnosis-specific outreach to area practitioners, improved care for cardiac patients, and community education through the VITAS Cardiac Care program.

VITAS makes it a condition of this application to provide this program to hospice patients in Service 5A. The program will include the following elements:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, social workers, and chaplains will complete the training modules in the VITAS Cardiac Program Resource Manual (or its successor) within three months of their start date. Compliance with this condition will be shown by a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.
- **Provider Input:** VITAS will publicize and offer semi-annual meetings open to area cardiologists and their support staff, for the first three years of operation. These meetings will be a forum to discuss VITAS' cardiac program and obtain feedback from physicians and other clinicians on how VITAS can address their patients' needs. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the meetings were offered.
- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer semi-annual cardiac-related continuing education to area healthcare providers, for the first three years of operation. The education will focus on end-of-life care for patients with cardiac diagnoses. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.
- **Community Education:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" events open to the public for the first three years of operation. These events will be a forum for area residents to ask hospice physicians and/or other VITAS clinicians about hospice care, cardiac disease, caregiving, and support for individuals with cardiac disease. As part of the first

three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.

- **American Heart Association Certification:** VITAS will obtain certification within two years of the start of operations in Service Area 5A from the American Heart Association's Palliative/Hospice Heart Failure Program. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager as part of the first two annual CON condition compliance reports.

### **VITAS Pulmonary Care Program**

At least four hospitals in Service Area 5A utilized hospice for respiratory patients at a rate less than the statewide average, and at least two hospitals had shorter average length of stays than the statewide average. These metrics can be indicators of late referrals and a need for patient and staff education. VITAS proposes to improve these metrics in Service Area 5A with targeted, diagnosis-specific outreach to area practitioners, improved care for pulmonary patients, and community education through its Pulmonary Care program.

The Pulmonary Care program is described in detail in Schedule B and has three primary goals: 1) improving end-of-life care for patients with pulmonary diagnoses; 2) increasing area healthcare providers' awareness of hospice care for patients with respiratory diagnoses, and 3) increasing area residents' awareness of hospice care for patients with respiratory diagnoses. The program will include the following elements:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, physicians, social workers, and chaplains will complete training regarding care for patients with pulmonary diagnoses and their families within the first three months of their start date. Training will include at least three elements: 1) Education on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease; 2) Education on End-Stage Pulmonary Disease, and 3) Training on removal from mechanical ventilation. Compliance with this condition will be shown in a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.

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- **Provider Input:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual meetings open to area pulmonologists, their support staff, and other physician stakeholders, for the first three years of operation. These meetings will be a forum to discuss VITAS' Pulmonary Care program and obtain feedback from physicians and other clinicians on patients' needs and how the program can best address them. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the meetings were offered.
- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer COPD-related continuing education to area healthcare providers, for the first three years of operation. The education will focus on end-of-life and palliative care. VITAS will offer two programs to area providers for at least the first three years of operation. The two programs will be "Palliative Care for End-Stage COPD Patients" and "COPD: The Disease." As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.
- **Community Education:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" events open to the public, for at least the first three years of operation. These events will be a forum for area residents to ask a hospice physician and other VITAS clinicians about hospice care, end-stage pulmonary disease, and caregiving and support for individuals with respiratory disease. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.
- **Respiratory Therapist:** VITAS will include a respiratory therapist in its staffing plan for Service Area 5A. The respiratory therapist will provide patient care and serve as an educational resource to other hospice staff. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing the name and start date of the respiratory therapist in the annual CON condition compliance report.

### **VITAS Diabetes Care Program**

The diabetes death rate in Pasco County is higher than in the state's, 3.48 percent versus 3.16 percent, respectively. As many as 11.7 percent of adults in Pasco County have been diagnosed with diabetes. VITAS proposes to improve these metrics in Service Area 5A with targeted, diagnosis-specific outreach to area practitioners, improved care for diabetes patients, and community education through its Diabetes Care program.

The Diabetes Care program is described in detail in Schedule B and has three primary goals: 1) improving end-of-life care for patients with diabetes; 2) increasing area healthcare providers' awareness of hospice care for patients with diabetes, and 3) increasing area residents' awareness of hospice care for patients with diabetes. The program will include the following:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, physicians, social workers, and chaplains will complete training regarding care for patients with diabetes diagnoses and their families within the first three months of their start date. Compliance with this condition will be shown by a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.
- **Provider Input:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual meetings open to area physicians and their support staff for at least the first three years of operation. These meetings will be a forum to discuss VITAS' Diabetes Care program and obtain feedback from physicians and other clinicians on patients' needs and how the program can best address them. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the meetings were offered.
- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer diabetes continuing education to area healthcare providers, for at least the first three years of operation. The education will focus on control of Hyperglycemia and its symptoms, evaluation and treatment of diabetes complications, assessment of conditions in which diabetes treatment approach may have a significant impact and avoiding hypoglycemia. As part of the first three

annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.

- **Community Education:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" events open to the public, for at least the first three years of operation. These events will be a forum for area residents to ask a hospice physician and other VITAS clinicians about hospice care, end-stage diabetes, and caregiving and support for individuals with diabetes. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.

### **VITAS Sepsis Care Program**

VITAS' Sepsis and Post-Sepsis Syndrome Program will benefit Service Area 5A. Four hospitals in Pasco County had lower utilization of hospice for sepsis patients than the statewide average. Four hospitals in Pasco County had shorter average lengths of stay than the statewide average, and two hospitals had higher readmission rates than the statewide average.

The Sepsis Care program is described in detail in Schedule B and has three primary goals: 1) improving end-of-life care for patients with sepsis diagnoses; 2) increasing area healthcare providers' awareness of hospice care for patients with sepsis diagnoses, and 3) increasing area residents' awareness of hospice care for patients with sepsis diagnoses. The program will include the following elements:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, physicians, social workers, and chaplains will complete training modules in the VITAS Sepsis Program Resource Manual within three months of their start date. Compliance with this condition will be shown by a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.
- **Provider Input:** For at least the first three years of operation, VITAS will publicize and host meetings with hospital staff and physicians to serve as a forum to discuss VITAS' sepsis program and obtain feedback from physicians and other clinicians on how VITAS can address their patients' needs. As part of the first

three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the meetings were offered.

- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer an annual sepsis-related continuing education to area healthcare providers for at least the first three years of operation. The education will focus on end-of-life care for patients with sepsis diagnoses. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.
- **Community Education:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" events open to the public) for at least the first three years of operation. These events will be a forum for area residents to ask a hospice physician and other VITAS clinicians about hospice care, sepsis, and caregiving and support for individuals with sepsis diagnoses. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.

### **VITAS Alzheimer's and Dementia Care Program**

In Pasco County, in 2022, the percentage of Probable Alzheimer's Cases in residents age 65 years and older was 11.3, compared to the statewide average of 11.4 percent. As a chronic and incurable disease, patients with Alzheimer's and dementia represent a fast-growing group of hospice patients. VITAS is committed to bringing the latest innovations to end-of-life care to patients and their caregivers. VITAS' approach to caring for patients with Alzheimer's and dementia is threefold: 1) reducing inappropriate psychotropic use and enhance other nonpharmacological interventions; 2) educating hospice staff, caregivers, and area healthcare providers; and 3) conducting ongoing research on hospice care for these patients.

VITAS conditions this application on implementing its Alzheimer's and Dementia Care Program that will include the following elements:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, physicians, social workers, and chaplains will complete training modules in the VITAS Alzheimer's and Dementia Care program within three months of their start date. VITAS' Alzheimer's and Dementia Care program

includes 2.5 hours of CEOs covering evidenced-based protocols for behavioral symptoms. Compliance with this condition will be shown by a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.

- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer annual Alzheimer's and dementia disease-related continuing education to area healthcare providers, for at least the first three years of operation. The education will focus on end-of-life care for patients with Alzheimer's and dementia diagnoses. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.
- **Music Therapy:** It has been shown that Alzheimer's and dementia patients benefit from music therapy. VITAS conditions this application on providing music therapy to these patients. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation statement from the General Manager that music therapy was offered.
- **VIP Program:** Research demonstrates that Alzheimer's and dementia patients benefit from individualized care plans. The VIP Program leverages a brief informational interview with the primary caregiver to understand the patient's likes and dislikes to develop a whole-person-centered care plan. VITAS will offer its VIP Program for these patients. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that this program was offered.

### **Palliative Care Resources**

VITAS offers all of its patients options for palliative care, as its care is a vital component of high-quality, comprehensive hospice care. The palliative care services offered by VITAS are described in detail in Schedule B. It is important to note that not all patients who could benefit from palliative care are eligible for hospice care. In order to determine what services are appropriate for patients seeking hospice care, it is important to have a detailed, open discussion with the

patient and his or her family concerning end-of-life goals and advanced care planning. To ensure Service Area 5A patients who would benefit from palliative care receive the services they need, VITAS conditions this application on:

- **Engaging area residents with serious illness in advance care planning and goals of care conversations:** VITAS conditions this application on providing easy-to-understand documents and aides to facilitate patient decisions on care for serious illness. Additionally, VITAS will use the Five Wishes document and a wishes and values guide during advance care planning and goals of care conversations. For the first three years of operation, compliance with this condition will be documented by an attestation statement from the General Manager
- **Providing Palliative Services to Hospice Patients with Cancer:** Some cancer patients can only access hospice services if the hospice can provide or arrange for treatments that are more palliative in nature, including such treatment as chemotherapy and radiation to manage pain. Not all hospice programs provide such services even if medically necessary. VITAS will provide palliative chemotherapy, radiation, and pain pumps to manage patients' pain and symptoms, as appropriate. Compliance with this condition will be documented by attestation from the General manager that these services were offered and/or provided to patients in the service area.

### **Community Outreach Programs for Hispanic Population**

In Service Area 5A, the Hispanic population has increased yearly since 2018. In 2022, the Hispanic population made up 18.1% of the total population and 9.9% of the age 65 plus population. Despite these statistics, the hospice use rate for Hispanic patients is only 2.0%, low in comparison to the Hispanic population in the county, indicating that this is an underserved group. To increase access to hospice care for the Hispanic population in Pasco County, VITAS will implement the following:

**Spanish Speaking VITAS Representative:** VITAS conditions this application on providing a VITAS representative to Service Area 5A who is fluent in Spanish. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the annual conditions compliance report.

**Community Support:** VITAS will donate \$50,000 to the Hispanic Services Council (or a similar organization that provides outreach to this community) within the first two years of operations. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing AHCA with copies of the checks and the name of the grantee as part of the first two annual condition compliance reports.

- VITAS will coordinate with the grantee's Community Health Worker to facilitate outreach to the community and provide hospice education for the first three years of operation. VITAS will also provide hospice-related educational materials, in Spanish, to the community, for at least the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.
- Bridging the Gap Training/Discussion/Toolkit: VITAS has created a Bridging the Gap training and panel discussion for healthcare professionals and spiritual leaders on the needs of the Hispanic community (and other minority communities) at the end of life and how to engage families in end-of-life discussions. The Bridging the Gap Toolkit will also be offered to spiritual leaders to review evidence about preferences on end-of-life care and provide resources for end-of-life conversations, including how to address a patient's faith and how to engage a terminally ill patient's family to provide support. VITAS conditions this application on offering the Bridging the Gap program in the service area for the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.

### **Community Outreach for Access of Care for Hospice**

The US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) designated Pasco County as a Health Professional Shortage Area. A Health Professional Shortage Area may refer to geographic areas, populations, or facilities where there is a shortage. Often, the healthcare providers in health professional shortage areas are overworked and have fewer resources to care for patients. The residents living in these areas often have a much lower socioeconomic status and face financial barriers to healthcare. To help Pasco County residents, VITAS conditions this application on the following:

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- **VITAS Mobile Hospice Education Vehicle:** VITAS will provide a Mobile Hospice Education Vehicle for outreach to the community and to offer end-of-life education, for at least the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation by the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.
- **Community Support:** To further improve access to healthcare to residents with limited resources, VITAS conditions this application on providing grants in the amounts of \$75,000 to the Good Samaritan Health Clinic of Pasco County (or similar organization) and \$75,000 to St. Andre Free Clinic in Dade City (or similar organization), within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation by the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.
- **Support for Nursing Programs:** To help alleviate the health professional shortage in the area, VITAS conditions this application on providing support to Pasco-Hernando State College's nursing program (or similar educational institution). Within the first two years of operation, VITAS will donate \$75,000 to its nursing program and will offer its nursing students community-based clinical experiences (that are neither invasive or complex). Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual condition compliance reports.

### **Community Outreach for Bereavement Services**

Through its communication with Pasco County healthcare providers, community leaders, and residents, VITAS learned that there is a lack of bereavement support after the loss of a loved one in hospice. VITAS conditions this application on providing a Community Healthcare Worker to help facilitate grief support for the community and will offer support groups and caregiver support groups available to the public. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.

### **Veterans Program**

Veterans have unique end-of-life care needs and benefit from specialized programming and care. There is a significant veteran

population in Service Area 5A. To meet the needs of this special population, VITAS will ensure programming and recognition for veterans at the end of life.

- **Honor Flight Network:** VITAS conditions this application on offering the virtual reality, "flightless" Honor Flight Visits Program to veterans who cannot participate in the Honor Flight Network trips to Washington D.C. This program is described in detail in Schedule B. For the first three years of operation, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager.
- **Veterans Walls:** VITAS also conditions this application on offering to install a Veterans Wall in at least two area assisted living facilities or nursing homes within the first two years of operation. The walls will showcase a VITAS-provided photo plaque for each veteran resident, engraved with the individual's name and branch of service. The wall serves as a resource for the community and a location for veteran-specific events. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager, in the first two annual condition compliance reports, that VITAS offered to sponsor and create the walls.
- **We Honor Veterans:** VITAS conditions this application on the Service Area 5A program entering the We Honor Veteran program and achieving Level 4 commitment to the program within the first three years of operation. VITAS regularly participates in the We Honor Veterans Program, which is described in detail in Schedule B. Compliance will be documented in the first three annual CON condition compliance reports, by attestation from the General Manager, of the program's We Honor Veterans Level and the date the program achieves Level 4 status.
- **Veteran Representative:** VITAS will provide a veteran representative to the Service Area 5A program to assist its veteran hospice patients and their families. The representative will develop solutions that meet the unique needs of veteran hospice patients and as an educational resource to the community and other hospice staff. Compliance with this condition will be documented by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual condition compliance reports.

- **Veterans Benefits Assistance Program:** VITAS conditions this application on offering its Veterans Assistance Program to assist veteran hospice patients and their families. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports that this program was offered.
- **ELNEC Training:** For the first two years of operation, VITAS conditions this application on providing the ELNEC End-of-Life Education Training-For Veterans Project to its nurses in order to better educate them on how to provide palliative care to veterans. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first two annual condition compliance reports.
- **Grant to Qualified Agency:** To further support the veteran population in Service Area 5A, VITAS conditions this application on providing support in the amount of \$20,000 to Veterans Last Patrol (or a similar organization that provides support to the veteran community in the service area) within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by providing copies of the checks and the name of the grantee as part of the first two annual compliance reports.

### **Solo Agers Outreach Program**

As previously mentioned, as of 2022, over 130,000 people in Pasco County are aged 65 and older. Of that population, it is estimated that over 26.2% of them live alone. A "solo ager" is defined as an elderly person who lacks caregiver support, either because they either live alone or their primary caregiver is unable to properly care for them. To serve the elderly population in Service Area 5A, particularly the elderly that lack caregiver support, VITAS conditions the following:

- **Solo Agers Outreach Program:** VITAS conditions this application on implementing its Solo Agers Outreach Program within the first two years of operation. This program will allow solo agers on service with VITAS to age in place safely with the knowledge that their needs will be met with compassion and kindness. To reach this goal, VITAS will provide a Community Healthcare Worker to assist its solo ager patients by identifying community services that will meet their needs. The Community Healthcare Worker will also collaborate with local qualified

agencies to provide care for this group. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.

- **Grants to Qualified Agencies:** VITAS conditions this application on providing support in the amount of \$65,000 to Pasco County Senior Services, specifically the Home Care for Elderly Program (or similar organization). VITAS also conditions this application on providing support in the amount of \$50,000 to Feeding Pasco's Elderly (or similar organization) to support home-delivered meals. Compliance with these conditions will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.

### **Outreach Programs for Pasco County Residents Experiencing Homelessness, Poverty, and Food Insecurity**

VITAS is committed to caring for all patients, regardless of their socioeconomic status or where they call home. VITAS is also committed to providing resources that will improve quality of life for all residents of the service area. VITAS conditions this application on providing a Community Healthcare Worker to provide outreach and hospice education to impoverished and homeless individuals in the service area. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager.

- **Community Support:** VITAS conditions this application on providing assistance to homeless and impoverished communities in Service Area 5A. Specifically, VITAS conditions this application on providing financial support to the following organizations, within the first two years of operation:
  - Metropolitan Ministries: A grant of up to \$60,000 to Metropolitan Ministries, earmarked for MiraclePlace Pasco (or similar organization that assists impoverished and homeless individuals). Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.

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- VITAS will collaborate with this organization to provide educational materials about hospice care (including, but not limited to, its HELLO program), for the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be provided by an attestation from the General Manager, in the first three annual condition compliance reports.
- Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County: A grant of up to \$50,000 to the Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County (or similar organization) to assist homeless individuals in the service area. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.
- VITAS will collaborate with this organization to provide educational materials about hospice care (including, but not limited to, its HELLO program), for at least the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be provided by an attestation from the General Manager, in the first three annual condition compliance reports.
- Feeding Tampa Bay: A grant of up to \$50,000 to Feeding Tampa Bay (or similar organization), earmarked for Pasco County, to provide assistance to the food-insecure individuals in the service area. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.

### **Outreach Programs for Pasco County Seniors and Caregivers**

In its communication with Pasco County Senior Services, VITAS learned that there is a need for support for Pasco County's senior citizens and caregivers. VITAS conditions this application on providing a Community Healthcare Worker to collaborate with Pasco County Senior Services to provide outreach and educational resources to caregivers and senior citizens, for the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.

- **Pasco County Senior Services:** VITAS will further support Pasco County's Senior Services (or other similar organization) mission to assist caregivers by donating \$60,000, within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.
- **Seniors in Service:** VITAS conditions this application on providing funding and/or crafting supplies, totaling \$20,000 and earmarked for Pasco County, to Seniors in Service (or similar organization), to support volunteer opportunities for seniors at the Pasco County Senior Services Center, within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.

### **Provider Education and Training Programs**

VITAS has met with several healthcare providers in the service area who indicate that there is a need for additional end-of-life care training for physicians, nurses, and social workers. Hospice education programs provide healthcare providers with vital information and tools to help appropriately identify patients that would qualify for and benefit from hospice care, thereby improving access to hospice care.

- VITAS conditions this application on offering its innovative Goals of Care Preceptorship and Certification Program within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual compliance reports.
- VITAS will offer an End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC) training program for nurses for the first two years of operation. VITAS will also offer an Education in Palliative and End-of-Life Care (EPEC) training program for physicians for the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual compliance reports.
- VITAS conditions this application on hosting annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" educational events, for the first three years of operation. These events are open to the public and are

for residents to ask a hospice physician or other VITAS clinician about hospice care, caregiving, and support for individuals who require hospice care. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.

- VITAS conditions this application on offering educational webinars, for at the first three years of operation, to representatives of Medicaid Managed Care programs, related to hospice eligibility. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that the education was offered.

### **Quality and Patient Satisfaction**

On May 18, 2023, VITAS' Florida hospice programs became CHAP accredited. Full accreditation for all VITAS programs nationwide is expected to occur by September 30, 2024. In order to provide high-quality patient care, VITAS is continuously reviewing its performance to evaluate what is working and to identify ways to improve. High-quality hospice providers must incorporate care and support services that not only alleviate painful symptoms of patients but also ease the major physical, spiritual, and emotional burdens of patients and their families during such a difficult time.

- Accreditation: VITAS conditions this application on adding this program for Community Health Accreditation Partner (CHAP) Accreditation. This condition will be supported by providing an attestation from the General Manager that it has earned CHAP accreditation within two years of operation.

### **VITAS Staff Training and Qualification**

Dedicated, experienced, and empathetic hospice staff are an important component to providing high-quality hospice care to patients and their families. VITAS is committed to ensuring all of its staff, including staff in Service Area 5A, are well-trained to provide the best possible care. Accordingly, VITAS conditions this application on:

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- The Medical Director covering Service Area 5A will be Board-Certified in Hospice and Palliative Care medicine or obtain certification through the Hospice Medical Director Certification Board.
- VITAS will provide a salary increase and will reimburse any testing fees for RNs, LPNs, home health aides, and social workers who obtain certification in Hospice and Palliative Care.

Compliance with this condition will be shown by attestation from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.

### **Other Conditions:**

#### **Hospice Office Locations**

The hospice office locations are important because they can facilitate hospice visibility, community awareness, and focused interaction with the community. VITAS is committed to increasing hospice awareness and utilization in Service Area 5A.

VITAS conditions this application on having two hospice offices in Service Area 5A within the first two years of operation. Compliance will be demonstrated by submission of the VITAS license with the office locations in the first three annual condition compliance reports.

#### **Services Beyond the Traditional Hospice Benefit:**

Although the following services are provided by VITAS as a standard part of its care to patients, these services are not typically provided as they are not part of the traditional hospice benefit. VITAS conditions this application on providing these services to its patients, supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual CON condition compliance reports.

- Providing admissions in the evenings and weekends
- Telecare Program
- Providing services to address medically complex, high-acuity services
- Free prognostication tool through VITAS App
- Comprehensive Pharmacy Program
- Paw Pals Therapy
- Hair Care Volunteers Lavender Touch
- Musical Memories

- Memory Bears
- Comprehensive Bereavement Services beyond one year
- Life Bio
- Free Prognostication Tool for area physicians
- Massage Therapy
- Specialty Children's Bereavement Services
- Commitment to providing medically appropriate therapies such as physical and occupational therapies

**VITAS Will Not Solicit Donations**

The primary purpose of this project is to improve patient access to hospice care, not financial benefit. Thus, VITAS will not solicit charitable contributions from patients, family, or friends relating to its services in Service Area 5A nor will VITAS engage in fundraising events for its program. Any unsolicited donations received will be given to VITAS Community Connections, a non-profit organization that uses funds to provide donations and grants to local organizations and families, ensuring that all money goes back into the local community. Compliance will be provided in the annual CON condition compliance report with an attestation from the General Manager confirming any unsolicited amounts were provided to VITAS Community Connections.

*Should a project be approved, the applicant's proposed conditions would be reported in the annual condition compliance report as required by Rule 59C-1.013(3), Florida Administrative Code. The proposed conditions are as the applicant stated. However, Section 408.043(3) Florida Statutes states that "Accreditation by any private organization may not be a requirement for the issuance or maintenance of a certificate of need under ss. 408.031-408.045, Florida Statutes." Section 400.606(5), Florida Statutes states that "The agency may deny a license to an applicant that fails to meet any condition for the provision of hospice care or services imposed by the agency on a certificate of need by final agency action, unless the applicant can demonstrate that good cause exists for the applicant's failure to meet such condition."*

*Hospice programs are required by federal and state law to provide services to everyone requesting them and therefore the Agency would not place conditions on a program to provide legally required services such as palliative radiation and chemotherapy and care to indigent and charity patients.*

*Issuance of a CON is required prior to licensure of certain health care facilities and services. The review of a CON application and ultimate approval or denial of a proposed project is based upon the applicable statutory criteria in the Health Facility and Services Development Act (408.031-408.045, Florida Statutes) and criteria within Chapter 59C-1, Florida Administrative Code. An approved CON does not guarantee licensure of the proposed project. Meeting the applicable licensure requirements and licensure of the proposed project is the sole responsibility of the applicant.*

**D. REVIEW PROCEDURE**

The evaluation process is structured by the certificate of need review criteria found in Section 408.035, Florida Statutes, rules of the State of Florida, and Chapter 59C-1, Florida Administrative Code. These criteria form the basis for the goals of the review process. The goals represent desirable outcomes to be attained by successful applicants who demonstrate an overall compliance with the criteria. Analysis of an applicant's capability to undertake the proposed project successfully is conducted by evaluating the responses provided in the application and independent information gathered by the reviewer.

Applications are analyzed to identify various strengths and weaknesses in each proposal. If more than one application is submitted for the same type of project in the same district (subdistrict or service planning area), applications are comparatively reviewed to determine which applicant best meets the review criteria.

Section 59C-1.010(3)(b), Florida Administrative Code, prohibits any amendments once an application has been deemed complete. The burden of proof to entitlement of a certificate rests with the applicant. As such, the applicant is responsible for the representations in the application. This is attested to as part of the application in the certification of the applicant.

As part of the fact-finding, consultant Sarah Zimmerman analyzed the application in its entirety with consultation from financial analyst Derron Hillman of the Bureau of Central Services who evaluated the financial data.

**E. CONFORMITY OF PROJECT WITH REVIEW CRITERIA**

The following indicate the level of conformity of the proposed project with the review criteria and application content requirements found in Sections 408.035 and 408.037, applicable rules of the State of Florida, and Chapter 59C-1, Florida Administrative Code.

**1. Fixed Need Pool**

**a. Does the project proposed respond to need as published by a fixed need pool? Or does the project proposed seek beds or services in excess of the fixed need pool? Rule 59C-1.008(2), Florida Administrative Code.**

In Volume 50, Number 23 of the Florida Administrative Register, dated February 2, 2024, the Agency published need for a new hospice provider in Service Area 5A (Pasco County) for the July 2025 hospice planning horizon. The applicants are applying in response to published need.

SA 5A’s CYs 2019—2023 hospice admissions by provider are shown in the table below. AccentCare Hospice & Palliative Care of Pasco County was originally licensed as Seasons Hospice & Palliative Care of Pasco County on April 14, 2020.

**Service Area 5A (Pasco County)  
Hospice Admissions CY 2019—CY 2023**

<b>Hospice</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019*</b>
AccentCare Hospice & Palliative Care of Pasco	459	310	266	158	0
Gulfside Hospice, Inc.	3,134	3,134	3,524	2,914	2,696
HPH Hospice	1,376	1,544	1,650	1,801	1,766
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,969</b>	<b>4,988</b>	<b>5,440</b>	<b>4,873</b>	<b>4,462</b>

Source: Agency for Health Care Administration Florida Need Projections for Hospice Programs, issued for the referenced time frames with the exception in the “Note” below.

Note: \*CY 2019 includes 2,168 July-December 2019 admissions which were not published due to the cancellation of the July 2020 batching cycle. Gulfside Hospice, Inc. had 1,300 and HPH Hospice 868 admissions during July-December 2019.

The applicants major need justification(s) are described below.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** contends that the general need for an additional hospice in SA 5A is supported not just by the Agency’s Fixed Need Pool but by the following:

- The large and growing population in the area
- The aging population in the area

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- Increasing numbers of deaths of Pasco residents and higher than average death rates for certain causes of death compared to the state
- The high percentage of Pasco County resident outmigration to other Florida providers outside of the county
- The low discharge rate directly to hospice from certain Pasco acute care hospitals to hospice programs for Medicare enrollees to who die within six months of discharge from a hospital in Pasco County
- The large percentage of Medicare enrollees who die within six months of discharge from certain hospitals in Pasco County, but never access hospice services.

The applicant states that SA 5A's greatest unmet need is in the 65 and older age group with non-cancer diagnosis and provides a number of charts from the Agency's February 2024, Hospice Need Projections for July 2025, Florida Population Estimates and Projections by District, 2020-2030, published January 2024, data from FLHealthCHARTS and Health Pivots DataLab on pages 34-50.

Suncoast states that it determined what general end-of-life programs, services and specialty programs were lacking in Pasco County by developing a community needs assessment tool, key informant survey, that was completed by approximately 20 key individuals and organizational representatives throughout the service area. The applicant states several Community Health Needs Assessments specific to Pasco County were reviewed including:

- All4HealthFL Pasco County Community Health Needs Assessment, 2022
- Florida Department of Health Pasco County Community Health Assessment, 2019, Revised May 2022
- Florida Department of Health Pasco County Community Health Assessment, 2019, Published May 2020
- Florida Department of Health Pasco County Community Health Improvement Plan, 2020-2025
- BayCare Community Health Needs Assessment Implementation Plans, Pasco County 2023-2025
- AdventHealth Dade City 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment
- AdventHealth Dade City 2023-2025 Community Health Plan
- AdventHealth Wesley Chapel 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment
- AdventHealth Wesley Chapel 2023-2025 Community Health Plan

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- AdventHealth Zephyrhills 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment
- AdventHealth Zephyrhills 2023-2025 Community Health Plan  
United Way 2023 ALICE Report, Pasco County

The applicant states its representatives obtained more than 30 letters of support and feedback from approximately 20 Key Informant Surveys for the proposed project, including letters/surveys from:

- Florida Department of Health - Pasco County
- Area Agency on Aging - Pasco/Pinellas
- Hospitals
- Skilled Nursing Facilities
- Assisted Living Facilities
- Home Care Organizations
- Outreach Organizations
- Physicians
- University Representatives
- Community Members
- Business Leaders

Suncoast provides a list of Key Informants in the application's Exhibit B and lists Key Informant Survey questions related to the continuum of care for residents with chronic and advanced illness:

1. What is your role and responsibilities within your organization?
2. What do you consider to be the strengths and assets of the Pasco community that can help improve hospice care?
3. What do you believe are the three most pressing issues facing Pasco County patients in need of hospice care?
4. From your experience, what are the greatest barriers to care for Pasco County patients in need of hospice care? What could be done to address those barriers?
5. What are the potential ways that organizations can work together to improve access to health care at the end of life in Pasco County?

Suncoast lists five gaps in end-of-life care for SA 5A residents, with detailed descriptions in the application's pages 7-9 and its proposed solution(s):

- Programs to Support Persons with Specific Diseases

Figure 21 (on page 48) uses FLHealthCHARTS provisional 2023 data to show leading cause of death for Pasco County residents, adding that Pasco County’s rates are higher than the Florida average for 10 of the 16 leading causes of death, meaning that area residents die of these causes at higher rates per population than the statewide average.

**Provisional 2023 Pasco County Resident Deaths by Cause**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Cause of Death</b>	<b>Resident Deaths 2023 Provisional</b>
1	Heart Diseases	1,553
2	Malignant Neoplasm (Cancer) (C00-C97)	1,479
3	Other Causes of Death	1,466
4	Unintentional Injury (V01-X59,Y85-Y86)	645
5	Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases (J40-J42, J43, J44, J45-J46, J47)	424
6	Cerebrovascular Diseases (160-169)	363
7	Diabetes Mellitus (E10-E14)	229
8	Chronic Liver Disease and Cirrhosis (K70, K73-K74)	146
9	Alzheimer’s Disease (G30)	138
10	COVID-19 (U07.1)	130
<b>Total top 10 Causes of Death</b>		<b>6,573</b>
<b>Total, 25 other Causes of Death</b>		<b>830</b>
<b>Total, All Causes</b>		<b>7,403</b>

Source: CON application #10772, page 48, Figure 21 (partially recreated).

The applicant’s Figure 22 on page 49 compares Pasco County's age-adjusted death rates by cause to Florida residents showing:

- Cardiovascular Diseases generally up over time, with the exception of a slight outlier in 2021
- Nutritional and Metabolic Diseases up since 2019
- Urinary Tract Diseases up since 2019
- Perinatal Period Conditions up since 2018, with the exception of a slight outlier in 2020
- Benign Neoplasms up since 2019.

Suncoast argues that existing hospice SA 5A agencies may not be meeting the needs of these populations, as evidenced by the large unmet need resulting from AHCA's need calculation and existing hospice agencies in Pasco County provide lower than average hospice service (defined as percent of patients by diagnosis taken from Medicare claims data) compared to Florida and National averages for certain types of patients. The applicant’s Figure 23, page 50 shows the percentage of hospice service to Pasco County Stroke patients is lower than the Florida and National averages for the 12 months ended September 2023.

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<b>Hospice</b>	<b>Claims – Percentage Patient – Stroke Diagnosis</b>
Average of Pasco County Hospices	6.3
Florida (All Hospices)	18.6
National (All Hospices)	10.6

Source: CON application #10772, page 50, Figure 23.

<b>Hospice</b>	<b>Claims – Percentage Patient – Stroke Diagnosis</b>	<b>Claims – Percentage Patient – Cancer Diagnosis</b>	<b>Claims – Percentage Patient – Heart Disease Diagnosis</b>
Gulfside Hospice	5.5	19.6	14.9
Florida (All Hospices)	18.6	21 .6	17.2
National (All Hospices)	10.6	22.1	1 8.6

Source: CON application #10772, page 50, Figure 24.

The applicant argues that Gulfside Hospice, the SA’s market share leader, provides lower than average hospice service compared to Florida and National averages for Stroke patients, Cancer patients, and patients with heart disease.

Suncoast describes its proposed CareConnections Programs it contends will meet Pasco County’s gaps in care that exist for hospice patients including:

- Empath Cardiac CareConnections Program
- Empath Pulmonary CareConnections Program
- Empath End Stage Renal Disease CareConnections Program
- Empath Alzheimer’s/Dementia CareConnections Program
- Wound Care and Ostomy Program.

**Empath Cardiac CareConnections Program**

Per the applicant, the Cardiac CareConnections and Advanced Heart Failure program aims to reduce emergency department visits and hospital readmissions, provide management of symptoms including administering and monitoring these medications such as diuretics and inotropes, crisis management, family education, spiritual and emotional support, and bereavement services.

Suncoast asserts the program provides expert symptom management in the home setting and the team:

- collaborates with the primary cardiologists and/or primary care physician and the hospice physician to treat heart failure symptoms expeditiously, using current evidence-based practice guidelines
- reviews and advises care plans for hospice patients
- makes home visits, as needed
- is available 24/7 to assist in/for crisis symptom management.

Suncoast states that the goal of its end-stage pulmonary disease programming will be to keep patients as comfortable as possible by helping to ease symptoms. Further, an integrative team of specialists will focus on helping patients breathe easier and obtain relief from:

- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD)
- Emphysema
- Bronchiectasis
- Pulmonary Fibrosis
- Chronic Respiratory Failure
- Cystic Fibrosis
- End-stage Tuberculosis.

Suncoast's Pulmonary Care Connections Program team includes Board-Certified Physicians, Respiratory Therapists, specially trained nurses, and general hospice team members such as social workers, chaplains, ancillary therapists, trained volunteers and bereavement counselors. Suncoast specialized services for patients with advanced lung disease, include:

- Pain and symptom management to reduce hospital visits
- Acute symptom management or respite in care centers
- Medication and equipment management
- 24/7 medical, emotional, and spiritual support
- Support and education for caregivers
- Integrative medicine and palliative art therapies to provide stress relief and reduce anxiety
- A plan of care based on the individualized needs and goals
- High-flow oxygen therapy - Airvo and Bipap
- Pleurex for chest drainage
- Tracheostomy care
- Compassionate ventilator withdrawal
- Ancillary therapy services- physical, occupational, speech therapy and registered dietitians.

**Empath End Stage Renal Disease CareConnections Program**

will focus on early identification and treatment for patients who desire to continue on dialysis despite six months or less prognosis as well as those who are no longer considering dialysis as a treatment option.

These patients include those with:

- history of diabetes and a creatinine clearance of 15 ml/min or less and not receiving dialysis
- a creatinine clearance of 10 ml/min or less and not receiving dialysis

- end-stage renal disease on hemodialysis with any of the following: uncontrolled chronic comorbid conditions, advanced stage cancer, significant functional decline, requiring assistance with activities of daily living or frequent hospitalizations due to poor vascular access for dialysis.

Suncoast assures that its interdisciplinary team will assess goals of care as well as achievement of symptom control on a regular basis adding that dialysis treatments will be continued contingent on:

- Goals of care
- Quality of life achievements
- Determination that the treatment continues to be reasonable and necessary to control symptoms
- Palliative performance status scores.

**Empath Alzheimer's/Dementia Care Connections Program**

program focuses on providing education and support to patients and their caregivers with the goal of improving quality of life while managing the symptoms of dementia. The program focuses on patients with:

- Alzheimer's
- Vascular dementia
- Lewy body dementia
- Frontotemporal lobar degeneration Parkinson's disease
- Mixed dementia.

The applicant states its services of massage music therapy for soothing and relaxation are used to bring comfort for the dementia/Alzheimer's patient. Suncoast offers that it includes Music in Caregiving and Caregiver Support/Coffee Breaks for caregivers that may suffer severe burnout and depression and the program provides specialized services including:

- Medical, emotional, and spiritual support available 24 hours a day seven days a week, expert physicians, nurses, social workers, spiritual care counselors, and volunteers all with advanced dementia specialty training
- Advanced care planning, licensed clinical social workers trained to guide families through end-of-life planning,
- Caregiver support coffee breaks- educational facilitators and fellow caregivers gather monthly for advice, information, and support
- Respite stays in our care centers-allowing caregivers short-term relief from their duties
- Medication management- maximizing quality of life and patient comfort

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- Caregiver education through the Florida Gulf Coast chapter and the Alzheimer's Association and community resources available for caregivers
- Palliative arts including
  - Music, massage, pet and aromatherapy and reiki
- Volunteer support including companionship, errand running, respite, transportation, and other special activities
- A plan of care based on individualized needs and goals

Suncoast states its care team includes a wide range of specialized staff including board-certified physicians, specially trained nurses and other specially trained staff members as needed. Further, its care team will include certified dementia practitioners that receive special training and educational programming through the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners (NCCDP). NCCDP's certification goals are:

- To enhance knowledge of safe and effective best practices
- To expand knowledge through training and education
- To provide better quality of care for dementia patients
- To validate Alzheimer's and dementia knowledge and skills
- To increase credibility of profession and recognition appears
- To increase caregiver self confidence.

### **Wound Care/Ostomy Nursing Program**

Suncoast states this program will include experienced registered nurses with a minimum of a bachelor's degree who have completed special education beyond basic nursing education and are board certified in the nursing management of patients with wound and ostomy care needs. Further, these nurses will partner with health care consumers, families/caregivers, and other health care providers and members of the health care team to coordinate an individualized wound, ostomy, and/or continence care across the continuum of care, and will:

- Coordinate care with the patient, Hospice case manager, caregiver, physicians, and outside wound care specialists to enhance the treatment plan or identify alternative options for wounds or other complications/complex problems that are difficult to manage
- Develop evidence based wound care assessment guidelines for staff
- Provide education on product choices to Hospice staff, caregivers, and community partners
- Provide consult visits with hospice case managers for patients with complex wounds/ostomies/drains

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- Collaborate with Empath Hospice nursing staff regarding recommendations for support/pressure redistributions surfaces and specialty DME to promote optimal skin protection and healing
- Promote optimal wound management environment to prevent deterioration of existing wounds and the development of additional wounds or complications
- Partner with Empath Hospice/Empath Health Informatics Department to develop an informatics review/chart auditing process to identify and promote best practices in providing wound care

Suncoast states it will also offer a Compression Program and an Ostomy Management Program with monthly classes offered by Empath Health's Hospice Division agencies that will be the basis for the development of the Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing and Compression Therapy Program.

**Programs to Support Specific Racial/Ethnic Groups**

Suncoast indicates that the non-white population represent “a critical mass” or 14.5 percent of Pasco County residents. Suncoast states that the disparity use of hospice by this racial/ethnic group is also evident in the analysis of the death service ratio and Medicare enrollee population of the area. Further, the Hospice death service ratio for the Black population in Pasco County has improved but has not reached a level that is consistent with the SA’s other racial/ethnic groups. Suncoast contends that additional access points and education are needed in order to reach this population.

**Pasco County 2023 Population Distribution by Race**

<b>Race</b>	<b>2023 Percent of Total</b>
White Alone	85.4%
Black or African American Alone	7.7%
American Indian or Native American Alone	0.5%
Asian Alone	3.5%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.7%

Source: CON application #10772, page 61, Figure 25, from U.S. Census Bureau.

**2023 Black and Hispanic/Latino Population in Pasco County**

<b>2023 Population</b>			
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Specific Population</b>	<b>Pasco Total</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>
Black	44,772	603,807	Black
Hispanic	109,270	603,807	Hispanic

Source: CON application #10772, page 61, Figure 26 from FLHealthCHARTS, February 2024.

**2023 Pasco County Black Population by Age Cohort**

Area	2023 Population Estimate			2023 Percent of Area Total		
	U65	65+	Total Black Population	U65	65+	Total
Pasco	40,053	4,719	44,772	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%
Florida	3,397,649	465,360	3,863,009	88.0%	12.0%	100.0%

Source: CON application #10772, page 61, Figure 27 from FLHealthCHARTS.com.

Suncoast states it (and its hospice affiliates) employ a multifaceted strategy in order to help increase awareness regarding end-of-life services and advanced directives as here is a lack of knowledge in the SA’s racial and ethnic minority populations. This will be addressed by:

- Recognizing that education and outreach is an important component of increasing access to end-of-life services for the underserved Black population in Pasco, the applicant will utilize its mobile care unit (Empath Mobile Access to Care) to go directly to areas where the population lives and works. Empath Mobile Access to Care will provide education, outreach, caregiver support and advance directives counseling to this population where they are, which will increase the reach of its programs as they will be brought to the people rather than the people having to navigate seeking them out. The mobile unit will include multilingual staff members and an LPN and a BSW.
- Implementing its highly successful Traditions/Tradiciones Programs to support populations with racial, ethnic and cultural differences
- Suncoast will work to connect with community organizations and participate in events where it will provide education on the grief process, Advance Care Planning, hospice services, Tips for Caregivers and Legacy Writing specific to Pasco County’s Black population.
- a General Care Council will include members from a wide range of communities in Pasco County. The goal of the Council will be for members of the community to provide feedback and guidance with regard to outreach to their individual communities.
- Suncoast will utilize two Community Partnership Specialists trained in Advance Care Planning, certified Alzheimer Caregiver Support Group Facilitators/Practitioners will conduct community engagement activities, facilitate education, and cultivate trust and partnerships within the African American, Hispanic and Veterans communities. Community Partnership Specialists will be culturally responsive to the community they serve.

Empath Health's Hospice Division is stated to currently offer specialized programming and education seminars, as well as Spanish-speaking care team members, Spanish language educational materials and Spanish language bereavement counseling and support groups.

Suncoast states that it has extensive experience with ethnic based community engagement through Empath programs whose relationships include the Hispanic Outreach Center, Hispanic Leadership Council, Latinos Unidos por un-Nuevo Amancer, and Coalition of Spanish Speaking Ministers to develop local relationships in Pasco County. Further, Empath Hospice Division teams participate in a number of Hispanic community outreach/education events and/or presentations annually with topics that have included grief, caregiver tips, living wills, planning, cancer, heart disease, overviews of hospice services and Empath Health programs/services. Advisory councils meet quarterly to learn about new programs, share ideas and assess outreach efforts.

Suncoast states its outreach specialists have developed relationships with community and faith-based leaders, and organizations, law enforcement agencies, various community groups, as well as civic and cultural clubs, it contends will increase access to end-of-life care to the African American population in the area.

Suncoast contends it has successfully cultivated strong partnerships with The Black Health Equity Alliance, National Council for Negro Women St. Petersburg Section, The Naomi and Titus Covenant Alliance Ministries and City of St. Petersburg Parks And Recreation – Enoch Davis Center. Further, it will seek opportunities to build stronger ties within the African American community.

**Programs to Support Homeless and Low-Income Populations**

The application's pages 65—72 discuss the SA's median incomes and lack of insurance, transportation, information, health care education, and generally poorer health status as well as access to technology in the service area. The mobile care unit will be staffed by a bilingual LPN and bilingual BSW and deploy remote/virtual technology platforms to enable its care teams and outreach liaisons reach residents/patients in a variety of ways to ensure their needs are met.

**Programs to Support Pediatric Populations**

Suncoast states intent to meet the unmet needs of the pediatric population in Pasco County by implementing:

- its “highly successful PIC:TFK program” in Pasco County

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- its perinatal loss doula program
  - providing pediatric hospice services through a team that is dedicated to service of pediatric patients throughout Suncoast's adjacent service area counties and this will include an expanded benefit for patients up to age 21, including care from a specialized pediatric staff
- Offer the concurrent care model so that pediatric hospice patients may also continue palliative treatment measures
- Work with area hospitals and medical practices to increase awareness, education and access to hospice services for pediatric patients. Suncoast letters of support include:
  - Trisha Larkin, MD, MBA, Physician with St. Joseph's Children's Hospital Pediatric Hematology and Oncology Office
  - Brooke Bavinger, MD and Stephen Mayper, MD, Medical Directors of St. Joseph's Children's Hospital Pediatric and Adult Chronic Complex Clinics
  - Michelle Blanco, MD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Assistant Director Pediatric Complex Clinic, University of South Florida

Suncoast emphasizes these facilities serve many Pasco County residents and restates it will implement its own Partners in Care: Together for Kids ("PIC:TFK") program to serve the needs of pediatric patients with chronic, advanced, and terminal illness in SA 5A, noting that Pasco currently has no current program participant (see Condition number 4). This program will provide palliative care and provide services which include:

- Pain and symptom management by RN or MD
- Respite by appropriate level of staff RN, LPN or HHA
- Hands on assistance with bathing dressing especially if the child's diagnosis means the parent requires additional training and assistance by home health aide personnel who are hospice prepared staff
- Counseling and spiritual counseling for patient or family
- Volunteer support to provide distraction as well as art, music and movement activities for patients Bereavement support to the family after the child's death

### **Programs to Assist with Care Navigation and Access to Hospice Services**

The applicant states its Key Informant Surveys and other Community Health Needs Assessments identified several barriers to care and

disparities for the Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, LGBTQ+, and older adult populations in the area. The All4HealthFL Pasco County Community Health Needs Assessment, 2022 and the May 2022 Florida Department of Health Pasco County Community Health Assessment snapshots and discussions are on pages 79-81 of the application.

Suncoast states that the disparity in hospice use is evident in the analysis of the death service ratio and Medicare enrollee population of the area noting that select Pasco County hospitals have a relative high percentage of Medicare enrollees that die within six months of initial hospital discharge without accessing hospice services. Further, the Hospice death service ratio for Pasco patients has remained constant since 2018, implying that hospice use is not growing relative to deaths. The applicant states that it will employ strategies to address challenges and diminish barriers citing its Conditions 2, 3, 6, and 7. Suncoast asserts its numerous letters of support speak to these challenges and cites excerpts on the application's pages 83-86 from:

- Bradford B. Barber, Director, Care Continuum, Tampa General Hospital and TGH North (Key Informant Survey)
- Lou Galdieri, Co-Chief Operating Officer, BayCare Health System
- Lee Edmister, Administrator of Life Care Center of New Port Richey (Skilled Nursing Facility)
- Lara Kelley, Executive Director of Vitality Living Hudson (Assisted Living Facility) and
- Yvette Guzman, CEO of Olive Health (Mobile Primary Care for Homebound Patients).

**Other Specialized Programs to be Implemented include:**

**Specialized Veterans Programming** – Suncoast will participate in We Honor Veterans and will offer a Veterans Living With Service-Related Illness Support Group and will also offer its Veterans Serving Veterans Program and the Veterans History Project. The applicant will also plan a specialized veterans mental health awareness program including virtual and in-person programming for grief support, community connections, knowledge of services and to honor their service.

**Community Partnership Specialists/Liaisons** – Suncoast states its community partnership liaisons and professional liaisons will provide outreach to clinical partners, using a collaborative approach to ensure access to education about end-of-life care, advanced care planning, and grief support. Two Community Partnership Specialists and two Professional Liaisons will be hired in year one and the program will have four Professional Liaisons by year two.

**Comprehensive Integrative Medicine/Palliative Arts Program** – that will draw on the expertise of its sister-hospice to offer integrative medicine such as mind-body practices, breathwork, guided imagery, acupuncture and cupping. Palliative arts will include licensed massage therapy, Reiki, music therapy, aromatherapy, horticulture, and pet visits.

**“Doctor Direct” Program** – which will offer direct access to an Empath Physician 24/7 for any physician in the community who has questions about a patient who might need hospice care.

**Music in Caregiving** – a music therapy-based program provided by colleagues and volunteers specially trained by the Hospice Division's Board-Certified Music Therapists. Benefits are stated to include:

- Decrease agitation, anxiety or other distress
- Increase awareness of self and others
- Stimulate memory and senses
- Increase comfort with the care experience.

Suncoast states patient response to the music therapy program has been very positive discussing patient responses. Empath Health Hospice Division's Board-Certified Music Therapists have conducted Palliative Arts Music (Part 1) and Music in Caregiving trainings (Part 2) for a total of 240 colleagues and volunteers, serving more than 965 patients with 13,822 visits in facilities and multiple homes.

✓ **General Hospice Services**

The applicant confirms that its proposed Pasco hospice program will also include a variety of general programs/services such as:

- Physician and nursing services
- Short-term inpatient hospice care (as needed)
- Physical, speech and occupational therapy
- Social work, counseling, and spiritual care
- Dietary counseling
- Telemedicine services for patients and caregivers
- Grief and loss counseling for individuals and families
- Trained hospice volunteers
- Specialized programs/services for:
  - Pediatric patients
  - Veterans
  - Disease-specific programming for persons suffering from:
    - HIV/AIDS

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- Heart failure and end-stage heart disease
- End-stage pulmonary disease
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Cancer
- Latino/Hispanic patients
- African American patients
- Homeless and low-income patients
- Persons residing in group homes, assisted living facilities and/or skilled nursing facilities.

Suncoast assures that it proposes a comprehensive program to offer a fuller continuum of needs for patients suffering from chronic, advanced, and terminal illness. The applicant notes its longstanding history hospice care in Florida, and that it serves Pinellas, Hillsborough and Polk Counties, which are contiguous to the southern border of Pasco County. The reviewer notes the Empath Hospice, LLC affiliate was initially licensed in SA 6B (Polk, Hardee & Highlands County) on August 20, 2023. Suncoast contends that Empath’s serving adjacent service areas and its expansive approach to end-of-life care set it apart from the other applicant to provide hospice care to Pasco County residents.

Empath states its tables (Figures 37, 38, and 39 on pages 91 and 92) are based on the Agency’s hospice projections and its projections to achieve a four percent market share in year one and seven percent in year two (see the table below).

**Empath SA 5A  
Projected admissions  
Years One & Two Ending September 30, 2025 & 2026**

	<b>Year One</b>	<b>Year Two</b>
Projected 5A Hospice Admissions	5,606	5,746
Empath 5A Projected Market Share	4.0%	7.0%
<b>Empath 5A Projected Hospice Admissions</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>402</b>

Source: CON application #10772, page 91, Figure 38.

**Community Support for the Proposed Project**

The application’s pages 93 –105 include excerpts from the Key Informant Surveys for the proposed project. Empath’s letters reference a variety of reasons additional hospice services are needed and why the letter author believes Empath is uniquely qualified to meet the need. The applicant concludes that it has shown a detailed, quantifiable need for its specific targeted programs that will be implemented in the SA noting that its representatives spent a

considerable amount of time and resources in conducting in depth Key Informant Surveys, having meetings with key organizations and stakeholders in Pasco County to determine what gaps existed in access to end-of-life care and how it could create action plans to fill the gaps.

Empath responds to Health Access Criteria on pages 106—109.

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contends that need for an additional SA 5A hospice is supported not just by the Agency's FNP but also by:

- Patients diagnosed with non-cancer, chronic, and terminal illnesses such as cardiac and pulmonary disease, sepsis, and Alzheimer's
- Patients in need of palliative care services such as palliative chemo, blood transfusions, pain pumps, mechanical ventilators, and other treatments that the existing hospices fail to provide
- Minority residents, the LGBTQ+ community, and Jewish residents
- Patients needing continuous care and high acuity/complex service offerings
- Veterans

VITAS contends that SA 5A's greatest unmet need is in the 65 and older age group with non-cancer diagnosis and provides three charts from the Agency's February 2024, Hospice Need Projections for July 2025, Florida Population Estimates and Projections by District, data from Trella Health Medicare FFS Data, Quarter 3 2022 through Quarter 2 2023, on pages 99 and 100.

The applicant uses Trella Health Medicare FFS Data to show that HPH reports an ALOS of 40.0 days during Quarter 3 2022 through Quarter 2 2023, 16 fewer days than the statewide average.

VITAS contends this indicates that patients are only getting care at the end-of-life and are not benefiting from hospice services that would be available through earlier admission and may also mean that the existing hospice provider is not managing the patient's pain earlier in their care, which may lead to hospital readmissions. VITAS shares that its long hospice average length of stay supports its dedication to outreach and education to the community and health care providers, making sure that patients, caregivers, and family members can maximize the resources available to them.

**Service Area 5A Hospice Average Length of Stay  
Medicare FFS Claims Data**

<b>Hospice Agency</b>	<b>ALOS (Days)</b>
Gulfside Hospice	58
AccentCare Hospice of Pasco	76
HPH Hospice	40
VITAS Healthcare — Brevard*	79
VITAS Healthcare — Miami Dade*	67
VITAS Healthcare — Palm Beach*	65
STATE ALOS	56

Source: CON application #10773, page 99, Exhibit 17.

Note: Each VITAS designation includes an aggregation from multiple Florida Counties and VITAS programs.

VITAS’s Exhibit 18 below compares existing 5A providers and VITAS end-of-life care based on the percentage of continuous care, which is appropriate for patients who have acute symptoms that the primary caregiver cannot manage with the goal to prevent or relieve suffering as much as possible and to improve quality of life while respecting the dying patient's wishes. VITAS argues that of the three existing providers, two offer no, and one offers very little Continuous Care and states it will ensure that Continuous Care is readily available to patients in the service area and provide educational materials and resources to patients, their families, and physicians, so that this level of care is utilized when appropriate. VITAS adds that it will also reduce the current gaps in care by balancing the various settings and locations where its services are offered and cites the application’s TAB 29 for more information.

**Percentage of Continuous Care — Existing 5A Providers and VITAS**

<b>Hospice Name</b>	<b>% of Continuous Care</b>
Gulfside Hospice	0.00%
HPH Hospice	0.09%
AccentCare Hospice of Pasco	0.00%
VITAS Healthcare — Brevard*	0.54%
VITAS Healthcare — Miami Dade*	1.96%
VITAS Healthcare — Palm Beach*	1.92%

Source: CON application #10773, page 100, Exhibit 18, from Health Medicare FFS Claims Data, Q3 2022 - Q2 2023.

Note: Each VITAS designation includes an aggregation from multiple Florida Counties and VITAS programs

VITAS provides a summary of SA 5A’s demographic and socioeconomic analysis and cites:

- Pasco County's minority populations are growing fast.
- The Hispanic population is not utilizing hospice at the levels it should
- The homeless population in Pasco County has increased
- Specific outreach is needed for the homeless, food insecure, ALICE, and residents living in poverty

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- There is a large military veteran population in Pasco County and this population needs specialized care
- The elderly residents of the service area are expected to increase significantly

VITAS provides Pasco County population statistics by age group for 2023-2030 and states that the SA 5A elderly population growth is significant because this population utilizes hospice care at a higher rate than all other age groups, which supports the increased need for hospice services.

**Service Area 5A Population by Age Group — 2023 to 2030**

County	Under 65	65 and Older	Total Population	Percent 65 and Older
<b>January 1, 2023 Population</b>				
Pasco	460,428	143,068	603,496	23.7%
Florida	17,623,531	4,905,607	22,529,138	21.8%
<b>January 1, 2030 Population</b>				
Pasco	503,939	174,208	678,147	25.7%
Florida	<b>18,506,107</b>	<b>6,020,500</b>	<b>24,526,607</b>	<b>24.5%</b>
<b>Percent Change 2023 to 2030</b>				
Pasco	9.5%	21.8%	12.4%	
Florida	5.0%	22.7%	8.9%	

Source: CON application #10773, page 102, Exhibit 19 from Florida Population Estimates and Projections by AHCA District 2020-2030, Published January 2024.

VITAS notes that a study published by Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine found that Medicare spends about 20 percent more on last year of life for black (African American) and Hispanic people than it does white people. VITAS contends that it will bridge the gap in care to minority patients, through outreach programming and building relationships with minority communities.

VITAS cites (Claritas) Spotlight (from Environics Analytics data) to indicate the SA 5A population growth rate by race and percentage of the total Pasco County population from 2023 and 2028 and in Florida overall. The applicant notes that the white population in Pasco County is larger than the state average of 55.7 percent and provides the following the breakdown for 2023 below:

- White - 70.7 percent
- American Indian/Alaskan Native - 0.4 percent
- Asian - 3.3 percent
- Black/African American - 6.7 percent
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander - 0.1 percent
- Some Other Race - 5.4 percent
- Two Races or more - 13.4 percent

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The applicant’s Exhibit 20 (on page 103) supports its position that Pasco County’s minority populations are growing fast noting that between 2023 and 2028, the percentages of the change in population for American Indian/Alaskan Native (20.8 percent), Asians (6.5 percent), Black/African Americans (4.3 percent), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (14.3 percent), Some Other Race (19.3 percent), and Two or More Races (16.8 percent) are growing at a higher rate than that of the White population (-0.9 percent). VITAS states that hospice service must be intentionally focused on these diverse populations to address the individual needs of these various minority groups and ensure adequate access to care for each.

Exhibits 21, 22, 24, and 25 on pages 104 —106 use (Claritas) Spotlight, Medicare Claims Data, and FLHealthCHARTS data as support for VITAS’ argument that the current providers are not serving the Hispanic population in Pasco County. VITAS points out that seven percent of the population in Pasco County, aged 65 years and older, identifies as Hispanic, but only two percent of the hospice patients served by the existing providers identify as Hispanic. This indicates that Hispanics are not utilizing hospice at the levels they should.

VITAS confirms that it conditions this application on providing a dedicated VITAS representative who is fluent in Spanish, and collaboration with the Hispanic Services Council (or similar organization) to provide education materials about hospice care and eligibility, in Spanish to better meet the needs of the SA’s Hispanic population. Further, VITAS conditions project approval to donating \$50,000 to the Hispanic Services Council (or similar organization) to increase Hispanic access and opportunities in Pasco County.

**Service Area 5A Hospice Patients  
By Ethnicity - 2022 Medicare Claims Data**

<b>Hospice</b>	<b>Number of Patients</b>	<b>Number of Non-Hispanic Patients</b>	<b>Percentage Non-Hispanic Patients</b>	<b>Number of Hispanic Patients</b>	<b>Percentage Hispanic Patients</b>
Gulfside Hospice	2,643	2,601	98%	42	2.0%
HPH Hospice	1,275	1,257	99%	18	1.0%
AccentCare	358	398	100%	0	0.0%
Pasco County	4,796	57.83%*	98%	78	2.0%

Source: CON application #10773, page 104, Exhibit 22 (combined with #23) from Hospice Analytics, Medicare Claims Data 2022, Report 11 by Beneficiary \*Applicant did not list a number but a percentage in this row and the number on non-Hispanic patients (398) exceeds the total patient number (358).

**Service Area 5A Population Percentage by Ethnicity, Age 65+ - 2022**

Demographic	Population	Percentage of Population
Non-Hispanic	120,017	92.9%
Hispanic	9,226	7.1%
Total	129,443	100%

Source: CON application #10773, page 104, Exhibit 24 from: FLHealthCHARTS, Aging in Florida Dashboard

VITAS notes that Hispanics account for approximately seven percent of Pasco County’s population but only two percent of hospice patients identify as Hispanic.

**2023 Population by Ethnicity by Zip Code and Neighborhood  
Service Area 5A**

Zip Code	Neighborhoods	Percent Hispanic Population
33523	Dade City	31.0%
33545	Wesley Chapel	30.4%
33559	Lutz	26.8%
33543	Wesley Chapel	26.5%
33544	Wesley Chapel	24.5%

Source: CON application #10773, page 105, Exhibit 25 from: Claritas Spotlight, Environics Analytics

VITAS assures that it has a long-standing record of serving all patients regardless of race or ethnicity attributing its success in reaching minority patients in part to its wide range of comprehensive outreach programs to overcome barriers to access faced by all underserved communities. Further, it tailors its programs to incorporate cultural traditions in hospice care to attenuate preconceived notions and apprehension among minority populations and will implement these programs in SA 5A.

VITAS next breaks down Pasco County socioeconomic factors into three categories: Homelessness, Impoverished and Food-Insecure Individuals, and Access to Care (see the table below).

**Homelessness in Service Area 5A and Florida  
as of July 1, 2021, 2022, & 2023**

	Homeless	Population*	Rate
<b>Pasco County</b>			
2021	857	567,269	0.15
2022	516	588,549	0.08
2023	680	603,496	0.11
<b>Florida</b>			
2021	21,141	17,576,508	0.12
2022	25,810	17,966,813	0.14
2023	30,809	18,243,592	0.17

Source: CON application #10773, page 107, Exhibit 26, from FLHealthCHARTS Homelessness Estimates and Florida Population Estimates and Projections, published January 2024.

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VITAS notes that Pasco County’s homelessness rate, which has increased since 2022, is below the state average. VITAS contends it is difficult to ensure access to hospice services for the homeless population, but based on its experience in serving this population in counties with similar demographic and geographic status, it will address homeless patient needs by working in tandem with homeless shelters and their staff to provide end-of-life planning and care, offering its full range of hospice services to shelter residents and their caregivers, along with personalized care according to the patient’s needs, including:

- Visits from a VITAS Community Health Worker to help the patient learn what benefits they have and to connect the patient with funding and locally available resources
- Grief support from VITAS' chaplains and social workers for other residents and shelter staff
- Education for shelter staff regarding who to contact if a hospice-enrolled resident has an exacerbation or needs immediate help
- Coordination with shelter staff to ensure safe, secure storage of a patient's medication

VITAS notes its proposed condition to grant up to \$50,000 to the Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County (or similar organization) to provide support to the homeless population.

VITAS next addresses household income stating that 63,675 households (26.8 percent of the total) in Pasco County have incomes below \$35,000, which is higher than the states’ 25.9 percent.

**Percent of Households with Income <\$35K Income (2023)**

	<b>Households &lt;\$35K Income</b>	<b>Total Households</b>	<b>Percent Below \$35K Income</b>
<b>Pasco County</b>	63,675	237,903	26.8%
<b>Florida</b>	2,271,458	8,776,976	25.9%

Source: CON application #10773, page 108, Exhibit 27 from Claritas Spotlight, Environics Analytics.

**2023 Population by Households with Income <\$35,000 by Zip Code and Neighborhood — Service Area 5A**

<b>Zip Code</b>	<b>Neighborhoods</b>	<b>Percent Hispanic Population</b>
33542	Zephyrhills	42.5%
34668	Port Richey	41.3%
34690	Holiday	38.3%
34691	Holiday	37.6%
33540	Zephyrhills	35.8%

Source: CON application #10773, page 109, Exhibit 29 from Claritas Spotlight, Environics Analytics.

VITAS states that ALICE (Asset Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed), refers to individuals earning more than the Federal Poverty Level but not enough to cover their basic needs and that in Pasco County in 2021, 47 percent of the 230,060 households, are below the ALICE threshold. VITAS notes that since 2019, Pasco County has had a five percent increase in the number of households that are below the ALICE threshold. Pasco County's percentage of residents experiencing food insecurity is slightly above the statewide rate (see table below).

**2021 Food Insecurity Rate — Service Area 5A**

<b>Area</b>	<b>2020</b>
Pasco County	11.0%
Florida	10.6%

Source: CON application #10773, page 109, Exhibit 30 from FLHealthCHARTS, Food Insecurity Rate, 2021.

VITAS points out that the highest risk of food insecurity are the poor and near poor, people of color, the unemployed, and the disabled resulting in having poorer health status assuring that it will help mitigate poverty and food insecurity and assist ALICE households by conditioning this application by providing a Community Health Worker to provide outreach and education. Further, VITAS will donate \$60,000 to the Metropolitan Ministries MiraclePlace in Pasco County (or similar organization), to provide meals, case management, educational opportunities (such as obtaining a GED and financial wellness classes), and housing assistance and \$50,000 to Feeding Tampa Bay (or similar organization), earmarked for Pasco County, to help the food insecure.

VITAS addresses a Pew Research Center survey, which describes the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic particularly among adults with lower incomes, those without a college degree, and Black and Hispanic Americans. VITAS concludes that impoverished individuals require more preventive health care education, a concerted effort to increase education related to hospice and palliative care and its commitment to providing this education with its experience and resources.

VITAS cites Pasco County's US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) designation as a Health Professional Shortage Area and VITAS's conditions for a Mobile Hospice Education Vehicle to provide outreach and end-of-life education, grants of \$75,000 to the Good Samaritan Health Clinic of Pasco County (or similar organization) and \$75,000 to St. Andre Free Clinic in Dade City (or similar organization) to provide health care to residents with limited resources, and donation of \$75,000 to Pasco-Hernando State College's nursing program (or

similar organization). VITAS indicates it “will offer its students community-based clinical experiences that are neither invasive or complex”.

VITAS notes US Census Bureau data shows that Veterans comprise approximately 7.8 percent of the total population in Pasco County which exceeds the state of 6.2 percent. The Veteran population will be a significant focus both through tailored outreach and availability of hospice care at home, noting it conditions this application on the implementation of specialized Veterans programs in SA 5A. VITAS contends that if approved it will ensure that Veterans have ample access to hospice services and that they and their families feel honored, comfortable, and safe during their end-of-life care. Programs the applicant proposes to condition project approval include:

- Engagement of a Veterans Liaison
- Participation in the We Honor Veterans program
- Virtual Reality/ "Flightless" Honor Flight Visits to DC War Memorials
- Veterans Walls in Area Assisted Living Facilities and Nursing Homes
- VITAS Veterans Benefit Assistance program
- Granting \$20,000 to Veterans Last Patrol (or similar organization)

VITAS cites its “extensive experience providing hospice care in” SAs like SA 5A and contends it will expand Veterans access to all settings of care and that Veterans will be served in the setting of their choice.

**Veteran Population of Pasco County**

	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Civilian</b>	<b>Veterans</b>	<b>% of Veterans</b>
Pasco County	609,141	516,686	47,455	7.8%
Florida	22,245,521	20,875,802	1,369,719	6.2%

Source: CON application #10773, page 111, Exhibit 31 from US Census Data, Quick Facts Florida, Population Estimates July 1, 2022

VITAS lists the six Pasco County hospitals that discharge patients to hospice and provides Exhibit 32 on page 113 to show the discharges to hospice for Medicare patients served in SA 5A. VITAS notes that:

- Advent Health Wesley Chapel Hospital’s hospice utilization rate was slightly below the state average and that
- HCA Florida Bayonet Point Hospital and HCA Florida Trinity Hospital had hospice ALOS was low when compared to the state average
- Half of the acute care hospitals in the service area have an above average hospital readmission rate (30-days) when compared to the state average

**CMS Hospital Discharges to Hospice: All Patients (Medicare FFS Only)**

<b>Facility</b>	<b>Hospice Utilization %</b>	<b>Hospice ALOS</b>	<b>Readmission Rate (30-Day)</b>
HCA Florida Bayonet Point Hospital	7.5%	31	17.6%
HCA Florida Trinity Hospital	8.0%	31	19.1%
Advent Health Wesley Chapel	7.4%	41	16.4%
Advent Health Zephyrhills	8.3%	47	16.0%
Morton Plant West Bay Hospital	7.5%	39	20.4%
Advent Health Dade City	12.5%	54	16.4%
<b>State Average</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16.8%</b>

Source: CON application #10773, page 113, Exhibit 32 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, Q3 2022 - Q2 2023.

VITAS contends that the overall SA 5A resident discharges from hospital to hospice could be improved with additional education and robust support programs for patients and their families. Further, it has already reached out to area hospitals and will specifically target those that have unusually low rates of discharge to hospice to increase education on the benefits and cost savings associated with referrals to home hospice. VITAS provides monthly education webinars for health care professionals with live presentations for disease-focused education and awareness, adding that its Physician Advisory Councils have proven effective to gain valuable input on patient needs.

Physician education on various end-of-life topics each month include:

- Hospice Basics
- End-of-Life Care
- Pain Management
- Hospice for Specific Diagnoses
- Hospice Eligibility.

VITAS contends its representatives receive extensive training and certification via the Evolution Training Program to become the best possible resources to assist clinicians and help their hospice eligible patients and can provide updated Partnership of Care information on mutual patients to help providers better understand how their hospice patients are cared for.

VITAS states SA 5A has eight nursing homes and four facilities with higher hospital admission rates than the state average. The applicant concludes this means that patient care is not well managed, and patients are likely being admitted to the hospital unnecessarily.

**Service Area 5A - Hospice Utilization in SNF**

<b>Skilled Nursing Facility</b>	<b>Hospitalization +30 Days Rate</b>
Blue Heron Health and Rehabilitation	13.3%
Solaris Healthcare Bayonet point	15.3%
Life Care Center of New Port Richey	21.4%
Madison Pointe Care Center	21.1%
Trinity Regional Rehab Center	18.6%
Advent Health Dade City TCU	14.4%
Advent Health Care Center Zephyrhills North	17.3%
Royal Oak Nursing Center	5.9%
<b>State Average</b>	<b>17.2%</b>

Source: CON application #10773, page 114, Exhibit 33 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, Q3 2022 - Q2 2023.

VITAS reiterates that it will:

- work with staff and patients to ensure hospice patients can remain in their setting of choice
- provide educational programming to staff to keep patients in the setting they call home; and that
- VITAS is committed to ongoing communication with the patient, their family, and the staff who care for the patient.

The applicant states understanding that not all hospice care is manageable in a home setting and VITAS prefers contractual agreements with local health care facilities to meet patients' needs and will partner with area providers. Further, it is actively in communication with existing providers (ALFs and SNFs) to ensure residents have access to inpatient hospice units and refers to the letter of support provided by Hillside Health and Rehab Center expressing willingness to enter into a contractual agreement to provide hospice inpatient care.

VITAS presents data for patients who expired that were admitted to a hospital but did not receive hospice care, which shows that in all eight of the hospitals in Pasco County, 88.5 percent plus of the patients were categorized in the "Late Hospice + No Hospice" category.

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**Hospice Timing — Pasco County Hospitals**

Hospital	Hospice Timing			
	Early Hospice	Late Hospice	No Hospice	Late + No Hospice
HCA Florida Bayonet Point Hospital	9.2%	53.3%	37.4%	90.8%
HCA Florida Trinity Hospital	13.7%	55.0%	31.3%	86.3%
Advent Health Wesley Chapel	14.2%	56.8%	29.0%	85.8%
Advent Health Zephyrhills	15.4%	54.4%	30.2%	84.6%
Morton Plant North Bay Hospital	11.0%	47.9%	41.0%	89.0%
Advent Health Dade City	12.2%	57.8%	30.0%	87.8%
<b>Service Area 5A Combined</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>49.5%</b>	<b>39.0%</b>	<b>88.5%</b>

Source: CON application #10773, page 115, Exhibit 34 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, Q3 2022 - Q2 2023.

VITAS' Exhibit 35 data shows that in the eight of the 17 SNFs in Pasco County, 88.50 percent plus of the patients were categorized in the "Late Hospice + No Hospice" category.

**Hospice Timing — Pasco County Skilled Nursing Facilities**

Skilled Nursing Facility	Hospice Timing			
	Early Hospice	Late Hospice	No Hospice	Late + No Hospice
Blue Heron Health and Rehabilitation	11.0%	61.0%	28.0%	89.0%
Solaris Healthcare Bayonet Point	8.6%	48.4%	43.0%	91.4%
Life Care Center of New Port Richey	17.6%	45.9%	36.5%	82.4%
Madison Pointe Care Center	9.1%	44.3%	46.6%	90.9%
Trinity Regional Rehab Center	7.5%	46.3%	46.3%	92.6%
Advent Health Dade City	9.5%	59.5%	31.0%	90.5%
Advent Health Care Center Zephyrhills North	15.1%	50.9%	34.0%	84.9%
Royal Oak Nursing Center	15.9%	43.2%	40.9%	84.1%
<b>Service Area 5A Combined</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>49.5%</b>	<b>39.0%</b>	<b>88.5%</b>

Source: CON application #10773, page 116, Exhibit 35 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, Q3 2022 — Q2 2023.

VITAS restates plans to implement its established educational outreach and continuing education presentations to Pasco County clinicians, contending that existing health care providers need more education about the hospice benefit, prognosis, and care goals.

VITAS argues that 2,369 patients of Pasco County were discharged to a post-acute care setting other than hospice, who were then re-admitted back to the hospital within 30 days with at least 529 additional patients discharged to a non-hospice setting that expired within 30 days of care commencing in their new setting showing a lack of understanding of the hospice benefit.

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<b>Facility Name</b>	<b>Readmissions</b>	<b>Mortalities</b>
HCA Florida Bayonet Point Hospital	607	164
HCA Florida Trinity Hospital	477	96
AdventHealth Wesley Chapel	407	78
AdventHealth Zephyrhills	330	64
Morton Plant West Bay Hospital	414	88
Advent Health Dade City	134	39
<b>Service Area SA Total</b>	2,369	529

Source: CON application #10773, page 117, Exhibit 36 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, Q3 2022 — Q2 2023. (\*\*Discharge destinations included in data contain the following: HHA (Total), Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility, Long Term Acute Care Hospital, SNF, No Post-Acute Care. \*\*\*At least" refers to data that includes one or more "Ins" designations.)

VITAS restates its commitment to serving all patients eligible for hospice care, including patients with complex needs and those at the highest level of continuous care, generates cost savings for the health care system by preventing hospital readmission and reducing acute care lengths of stay.

The applicant contends that 42 percent of Pasco County physicians are discharging patients to hospice very late with a hospice average length of stay of less than 30 days (149 physicians). VITAS assures that it’s disease-specific education, the Goals of Care Preceptorship Program and resources like the VITAS app will help Pasco County physicians become more confident and more comfortable communicating with their patients about prognosis. VITAS contends these programs improve clinical education and patient access to disease-specific hospice care, specifically working to address unmet needs and improving the patients' earlier access to hospice services.

VITAS indicates that the mortality rate for Pasco County is 851.8 per 100,000 population compared to Florida’s 738.1 per 100,000 population. VITAS’ analysis of mortality rates by race and ethnicity show a concerning high death rate for the Hispanic population in Pasco County of 644.2, compared to Florida’s 582.5 per 100,000.

**Pasco County Age-Adjusted Deaths from All Causes,  
Rate per 100,000 Population, 2022**

	<b>Pasco County</b>	<b>Florida</b>	<b>Pasco Percent of Florida Rate</b>
<b>All Populations</b>	<b>851.8</b>	<b>738.1</b>	<b>115.4%</b>
Black	713.2	823.6	86.6%
White	871.1	729.8	119.4%
Hispanic	644.2	582.5	110.6%
Non-Hispanic	882.7	778.6	113.4%

Source: CON application #10773, page 119, Exhibit 38 from Florida Health Charts, Deaths From All Causes, 2022.

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VITAS reiterates its ability to address these issues and that it has conditioned this application on providing specific programs and community outreach efforts to address the unique needs of this community.

VITAS data below indicates that Pasco County’s death rates exceed the state average for Heart Disease, Cancer Unintentional Injury, Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease, Stroke, COVID-19, and Diabetes.

**Leading Causes of Death Profile — Percent of Total Deaths - 2022**

Leading Causes of Death	2022	
	Florida Total	Pasco County
Heart Disease	20.86%	20.60%
Cancer	19.66%	19.12%
Unintentional Injury	7.17%	8.65%
Stroke	6.85%	5.24%
COVID-19	5.09%	4.50%
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	4.67%	6.17%
Diabetes	3.16%	3.48%
Alzheimer's Disease	2.68%	1.81%
Chronic Liver Disease and Cirrhosis	1.61%	1.72%
Nephritis, Nephrotic Syndrome, & Nephrosis	1.60%	1.35%
Suicide	1.44%	1.53%
Hypertension	1.37%	1.53%
Parkinson's Disease	1.32%	1.39%
Septicemia	1.21%	1.31%
Influenza and Pneumonia	1.20%	1.11%

Source: CON application #10773, page 120, Exhibit 39 from FL Health Charts, Leading Causes of Death Profile-Florida and Pasco County 2022

The applicant notes that through its research into and communication with residents of Pasco County, it has learned Pasco County is considered a “healthcare desert” and there is “a lack of education about hospice and that existing providers to not provide continuous care or medical interventions to meet the needs of complex patients.” VITAS reiterates its proven ability and that it offers specialized services designed to meet the specific needs of the community it serves including IV inotropes, sub-Q diuretics, LVADs, ventilation (CPAP and BIPAP), and home vent withdrawals.

VITAS notes that cardiac disease is among the top causes of death in SA 5A and provides SA 5A hospital CMS Medicare Claims Data for patients with cardiac disease and other circulatory diagnoses. The applicant notes that three Pasco County hospitals are utilizing hospice for cardiac patients at less than the state average and four had a hospice ALOS shorter than the state average.

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**CMS Hospital Discharges to Hospice: 5A Cardiac Patients (Medicare FFS Only)**

	Percent Population	Medicare Patients	Hospice Utilization		Average Hospice Length of Stay (Days)		Readmission Rate (30 Day)	
	This Facility	Annual Total	This Facility	State Average	This Facility	State Average	This Facility	State Average
HCA Florida Bayonet Point Hospital	29%	980	6%	7%	29	35	19%	19%
HCA Florida Trinity Hospital	19%	450	6%	7%	21	35	18%	19%
AdventHealth Wesley Chapel	23%	542	6%	7%	30	35	17%	19%
AdventHealth Zephyrhills	27%	554	7%	7%	37	35	16%	19%
Morton Plant West Bay Hospital	22%	396	7%	7%	34	35	19%	19%
Advent Health Dade City	23%	196	10%	7%	63	35	18%	19%

Source: CON application #10773, page 121, Exhibit 40 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, Q3 2022 — Q3 2023.

VITAS states that its' Cardiac Care Program, including its provider education components, will improve hospice access, prognostication, and symptom management and if awarded the certificate of need, it will bring these resources to SA 5A. VITAS also cites its condition to be an American Heart Association-certified provider of palliative and hospice care for heart failure patients.

Cancer is second-leading cause of death in SA 5A in 2022 and one SA 5A hospital utilized hospice for cancer patients below the state average and at least two Pasco County hospitals were below the States' ALOS.

VITAS asserts that not all hospice programs provide arrangements for palliative services including chemotherapy and radiation to manage pain and notes it proposes to condition the project approval on providing palliative chemotherapy and radiation to manage patients' pain and symptoms, as appropriate.

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**Hospital Discharges to Hospice:  
Cancer Patients (Medicare FFS Claims data Medicare for patients with cancer)**

	Percent Population	Medicare Patients	Hospice Utilization		Average Hospice Length of Stay (Days)		Readmission Rate (30 Day)	
	This Facility	Annual Total	This Facility	State Average	This Facility	State Average	This Facility	State Average
HCA Florida Bayonet Point Hospital	3%	93	24%	17%	48	25	17%	21%
HCA Florida Trinity Hospital	5%	121	18%	17%	15	25	15%	21%
AdventHealth Wesley Chapel	3%	70	22%	17%	38	25	19%	21%
AdventHealth Zephyrhills	2%	47	28%	17%	27	25	22%	21%
Morton Plant West Bay Hospital	1%	24	ins	17%	ins	25	25%	21%
Advent Health Dade City	1%	11	ins	17%	ins	25	ins	21%

Source: CON application #10773, page 122, Exhibit 41 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, 03 2022 - Q2 2023.  
Note: "ins" = insufficient volume/suppressed

Respiratory disease or COPD is a leading cause of death in SA 5A at least four Pasco County utilize hospice for these patients below the state average and two hospitals had a hospice ALOS shorter than the state average and one hospital had a readmission rate higher than the state average. VITAS reiterates its condition to offer its Pulmonary Care program in SA 5A.

**Hospital Discharges to Hospice: Respiratory Patients (Medicare)**

	Percent Population	Medicare Patients	Hospice Utilization		Average Hospice Length of Stay (Days)		Readmission Rate (30 Day)	
	This Facility	Annual Total	This Facility	State Average	This Facility	State Average	This Facility	State Average
HCA Florida Bayonet Point Hospital	6%	201	8%	11%	6	37	19%	21%
HCA Florida Trinity Hospital	6%	157	9%	11%	18	37	18%	21%
AdventHealth Wesley Chapel	7%	177	10%	11%	76	37	16%	21%
AdventHealth Zephyrhills	7%	145	14%	11%	92	37	17%	21%
Morton Plant West Bay Hospital	10%	185	7%	11%	48	37	26%	21%
Advent Health Dade City	10%	83	17%	11%	52	37	18%	21%

Source: CON application #10773, page 123, Exhibit 42 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, 03 2022 - Q2 2023.

VITAS provides SA 5A hospital data from the CMS Medicare Claims Data for patients with sepsis noting that four hospitals in Pasco County are utilizing hospice for sepsis patients less than the state average and that four hospitals had a hospice ALOS shorter than the state average. Two hospitals had readmission rates for sepsis patients higher than the state average.

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**CMS Hospital Discharges to Hospice: Sepsis Patients (Medicare FFS Only)**

	Percent Population	Medicare Patients	Hospice Utilization		Average Hospice Length of Stay (Days)		Readmission Rate (30 Day)	
	This Facility	Annual Total	This Facility	State Average	This Facility	State Average	This Facility	State Average
HCA Florida Bayonet Point Hospital	18.0%	18.0%	15	25	20.0%	19.0%	18.0%	18.0%
HCA Florida Trinity Hospital	17.0%	18.0%	17	25	20.0%	19.0%	17.0%	18.0%
AdventHealth Wesley Chapel	16.0%	18.0%	16	25	16.0%	19.0%	16.0%	18.0%
AdventHealth Zephyrhills	17.0%	18.0%	28	25	16.0%	19.0%	17.0%	18.0%
Morton Plant West Bay Hospital	12.0%	18.0%	13	25	16.0%	19.0%	12.0%	18.0%
Advent Health Dade City	26.0%	18.0%	40	25	13.0%	19.0%	26.0%	18.0%

Source: CON application #10773, page 124, Exhibit 43 from Trella Health, Medicare Claims data, 03 2022 - Q2 2023.

VITAS uses the Agency’s Florida Need Projections for Hospice Programs, February 2024 Batching Cycle for the July 2025 Hospice Planning Horizon, in Exhibit 44, page 124, showing that 638 hospice admissions are expected by 2024 which supports its position that there is a need for hospice services for patients in the Over-65, Non-Cancer category.

**February 2024 Florida Need Projection for Hospice Programs — Hospice Services Needed**

Service Area 5A	Current Hospice Admits			
	Cancer U65	Cancer O65	All Other U65	All Other O65
AccentCare Pasco	1,334	1,264	1,226	1,145
Gulfside	118	96	124	121
HPH Hospice	803	809	769	753
Need by Group	413	359	333	271
% Need by Group	-990	-105	-880	2,612
	-288%	-9%	-255%	70%

Source: CON application #10773, page 124, Exhibit 44 from the Agency’s Florida Need Projections for Hospice Programs, February 2024 Batching Cycle for the July 2025 Hospice Planning Horizon

VITAS argues that it has demonstrated that there is an unmet hospice need in SA 5A based on demographic and socioeconomic information as well as hospice referral data, mortality rates, and disease-specific statistics and has identified several underserved or unique Pasco County populations that would benefit from improved access to hospice services. These include:

- Patients diagnosed with non-cancer, chronic, and terminal illnesses such as cardiac and pulmonary disease, sepsis, and Alzheimer's
- Patients in need of palliative care services such as palliative chemo, blood transfusions, pain pumps, mechanical ventilators, and other treatments that the existing hospices fail to provide
- Minority residents, the LGBTQ+ community, and Jewish residents

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- Patients needing continuous care and high acuity/complex service offerings
- Veterans

VITAS reiterates that it has identified what elements are missing for hospice services in Service Area 5A through detailed discussions with community members, local organizations, and health care facilities, as well as the analysis of available data are as follows:

- Based on the Agency's Hospice Need Projections, there is a need for hospice care for noncancer patients, over 65 years of age
- Existing hospices providers in SA 5A provide a minimal amount of continuous care, which is a required and essential level of care to help patients can stay in their homes to receive hospice care
- Existing providers are not providing hospice care for patients with complex modalities, which prevents patients from aging in place.
- Existing providers do provide physical or occupational therapy for hospice patients.
- There is a lack of coordination and collaboration between the existing hospices and health care providers as well as a lack of after-hours support
- There is a lack of educational offerings about hospice and end-of-life care

VITAS contends that it understands the unique needs of the population cohorts in Pasco County and through its analysis has identified patients, patient types, and clinical settings in Service Area 5A that are underserved and/or would benefit from improved access to hospice services, including:

- The current Hispanic population is not receiving hospice benefits at the rate it should, and the county is growing more diverse
- Impoverished, ALICE, food insecure, and homeless communities have little to no support/education/access to hospice services
- Patients with diagnoses such as cardiac, pulmonary, sepsis, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease
- Hospice patients in need of palliative care, high acuity patients in need of complex services, and those needing therapies such as physical, occupational, and pet, massage, and music
- The veteran population in the service area needs specialized care

VITAS restates that through its extensive experience in providing hospice care it has developed the following programs to meet unmet hospice need in Service Area 5A:

- VITAS Cardiac Care Program
- VITAS Pulmonary Care Program

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- VITAS Cancer Care Program
- VITAS Diabetes Care Program
- VITAS Sepsis and Post-Sepsis Syndrome Program
- VITAS Alzheimer's and Dementia Program
- VITAS Goals of Care Preceptorship and Certificate Program
- VITAS Solo Agers Program
- Palliative care resources and access to complex and high acuity services
- 24/7 Telecare Program and access to admissions on evenings and weekends
- Community Healthcare Worker to provide outreach, education, and to foster collaboration with community organizations
- VITAS representative fluent in Spanish to provide outreach and education to the Hispanic community
- Outreach and end-of-life education for residents experiencing poverty, ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), homelessness, and food insecurity, including advanced care planning for shelter residents, food assistance, and housing assistance
- Bridging the Gap Program and Medical/Spiritual Tool Kit (outreach and end-of-life education for minority communities)
- Veterans Programs including a dedicated veteran representative
- Education materials in different languages
- Clinical education programs for physicians, nurses, chaplains, HHA's, and social workers
- Community grief support
- Community education about the hospice benefit and outreach programs to help with access to health care
- Partner with Food Insecurity Assistance Programs
- Partner with Housing Assistance Programs and Homeless Shelters
- Provide a Community Healthcare Worker
- Veterans Programs
- Partnerships with local organizations and facilities, including:
  - Hospitals
  - Nursing homes
  - Assisted living facilities
  - Clinics

VITAS asserts that it has continuously lived up to its reputation of quickly entering new markets, rapidly improving use rates, and consistently fulfilling its commitments to build relationships with community partners and provide holistic support services and high-

quality hospice care without affecting existing providers. VITAS projects 371 year one and 575 patient year two admissions. Projected SA 5A VITAS admissions by diagnosis and age are shown below.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida  
SA 5A Projected Hospice Admissions  
By Age and Diagnosis**

<b>Age and Diagnosis</b>	<b>Year One</b>	<b>Year Two</b>
Cancer Under 65	21	32
Cancer 65 and Over	70	109
Non-Cancer Under 65	20	31
Non-Cancer 65 and Over	260	403
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>575</b>

Source: CON application #10773, page 127, Exhibit 45.

**2. Agency Rule Criteria and Preferences**

**a. Rule 59C-1.0355(4)(e) Preferences for a New Hospice Program. The Agency shall give preference to an applicant meeting one or more of the criteria specified in the below listed subparagraphs:**

- (1) Preference shall be given to an applicant who has a commitment to serve populations with unmet needs.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** identifies the following five key areas where services are lacking or there is a gap in care for a specific population, including:

- Programs to Support Persons with Specific Diseases
- Programs to Support Specific Racial/Ethnic Groups
- Programs to Support Homeless and Low-income Populations
- Programs to Support Pediatric Populations
- Programs to Assist with Care Navigation and Access to Hospice Services

The applicant states that a detailed response for the programs is located in section E.1.a. of this application.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states the SA 5A populations experiencing unmet hospice need include:

- Patients age 65+ with non-cancer chronic and terminal illnesses such as heart disease, pulmonary disease, sepsis, and Alzheimer's and dementia

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- Patients in need of palliative chemotherapy and other interventions that the existing hospices do not provide
- Minority populations including the Hispanic population  
Impoverished, food insecure, and homeless populations
- Elderly hospice patients without caregivers
- Patients requiring continuous care and high acuity services
- Patients who would benefit from earlier admission to hospice

VITAS reiterates its response to Item E. 1. and that it has extensive experience in providing hospice care to non-cancer patients with chronic and terminal cardiac disease diagnoses, pulmonary diagnoses such as COPD, sepsis, Alzheimer's and dementia, and cancer.

VITAS mentions its training programs, outreach, programming, educational materials, and resources and services including pediatric care, pediatric end-of-life training, and children's bereavement partnership. Service Area 5A residents will benefit from programs Further, VITAS adds that it has developed to improve outreach and hospice care for various cultural, religious, and spiritual communities and LGBTQ residents.

- (2) Preference shall be given to an applicant who proposes to provide the inpatient care component of the hospice program through contractual arrangements with existing health care facilities, unless the applicant demonstrates a more cost-efficient alternative.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** states that it will not construct inpatient hospice beds at this time and plans to offer home-based hospice services as well as develop contracts with hospitals and nursing homes in Pasco County in order to provide increased access to hospice care and specifically inpatient hospice care for residents of the area.

Further, Empath Pasco will pursue contracts with BayCare hospitals in Pasco County and Life Care Center of New Port Richey (a skilled nursing facility) for the provision of general inpatient hospice care. Letters of support from Lou Galdieri,

Co-Chief Operating Officer of BayCare, as well as Lee Edmister, Administrator of Life Care Center of New Port Richey, which are provided in Exhibit 1.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** maintains that when a patient needs a higher level of care than can be managed with routine or continuous home care, VITAS will provide the inpatient care component of its proposed Hospice program through contractual arrangements with existing health care facilities to provide inpatient or respite care. VITAS anticipates entering an inpatient contract with Hillside Health and Rehab Center referencing its letters of support from area nursing homes, and ALFs in TAB 42.

**(3) Preference shall be given to an applicant who has a commitment to serve patients who do not have primary caregivers at home; the homeless; and patients with AIDS**

*Section 400.6095 (1) Florida Statutes requires hospice programs to make its services available to all terminally ill persons and their families without regard to... diagnosis, cost of therapy, ability to pay or life circumstances. Section 400.6095 (5) (a) Florida Statutes requires the hospice to identify the patient's primary care giver, or an alternative plan of care in the absence of the primary care giver, to ensure the patient's needs will be met. Section 400.6095(5) (c) Florida Statutes requires the hospice to assess patient and family needs, identify the services required to meet those needs, and plans for providing those services through the hospice care team, volunteers, contractual providers, and community resources.*

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** indicates that it has developed a comprehensive HIV/AIDS program and services and the homeless on pages 116 through 118 and maintains it is committed to serving all SA 5A patients.

Rishi Patel, PharmD, MBA, AAHIVP the President and CEO of CAN Community Health, provided a letter of support for the proposed project, stating strong support for “Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough's application to provide vital hospice services in Pasco County. We fully agrees that their proposal will help to provide critical hospice care for Pasco County residents in need. CAN is a comprehensive HIV/STD/viral hepatitis service provider.

*We have 38 clinics in six states and served more than 19,000 clients last calendar year. CAN has long time experience working with clients...including those who are experiencing end-of-life. We understand and appreciate the role of quality hospice care and critical comprehensive services provided by Suncoast Hospice for our clients...”.*

*We aim to work closely with Suncoast’s service network in Pasco County and look forward to offering their services to fill a critical need in our own client end of life care. CAN also currently works closely with their partner EPIC (Empath Partners in Care) throughout the Tampa Bay area. Like Suncoast Hospice, EPIC is a subdivision of Empath Health. EPIC offers support and prevention for those impacted by HIV and AIDS and will provide Ryan White program eligibility determination at CAN clinics. CAN looks forward to the opportunity for enhancing our partnership and facilitating care coordination with another subdivision of Empath. Our clinic is in New Port Richie (Pasco County) where both EPIC and Suncoast can provide services.*

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** indicates that it has developed a comprehensive HIV/AIDS program and services and the homeless and maintains it is committed to serving all SA 5A patients.

- (4) In the case of proposals for a hospice service area comprised of three or more counties; preference shall be given to an applicant who has a commitment to establish a physical presence in an underserved county or counties.**

SA 5A is a single county service - Pasco County.

- (5) Preference shall be given to an applicant who proposes to provide services that are not specifically covered by private insurance, Medicaid, or Medicare.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Pasco LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice, LLC (CON application #10772)** states it will provide the following: Empath Home Health (Palliative and skilled home health) including visits from nurses and certified home health nurse aides, pain and symptom management, wound care, physical, occupational and speech therapy, disease-related education and management, mental health RN, personal care, visits from social workers and spiritual care coordinators. Caregiver training on transferring patients, creating a safe environment, personal care

assistance and more., trained volunteers for companionship, specialized therapies (art, music, massage, Reiki, acupuncture, pet visits and errands, 24/7 support. The applicant also offers HIV/AIDS-EPIC (Empath Partners in Care) which is a comprehensive medical home model for persons affected by HIV/AIDS which includes Case management, testing, mental health and substance abuse counseling, risk counseling and services, prevention and education, food and personal needs pantry, children's program, emergency financial assistance, pharmacy services, housing and rental assistance. Empath offers Advanced Care planning with its My Choice My Life program and its Suncoast Hospice Foundation.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** provides a diagram of services that VITAS provides that are not specifically covered by private insurance, Medicaid, or Medicare, which include:

- Diagnostic Specific Programs
  - Includes Cardiac, Respiratory, Sepsis, Alzheimer's
  - Specialized staff training on cardiac care
  - Meetings with area cardiologists to discuss patients' needs
- Life Bio
  - A nationally recognized program that helps ease social isolation and loneliness through recording life stories
  - Enables patients to leave a legacy for their family and friends
  - Palliative Radiation and Chemotherapy
  - Will be provided to optimize pain and symptom management, as medically necessary
- We Honor Veterans
  - Staff and volunteers will be trained on compassionate listening and grateful acknowledgement
  - Assist with replacing medals and record military experience
- Lavender Touch Experience
  - Aromatherapy program that gives patients a caring touch and healing benefits of lavender
  - Beneficial for insomnia, anxiety, and stress
- Musical Memories
  - Volunteers help patients select music and listen to familiar songs

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- Some volunteers bring a musical instrument or sing songs to patients
- Paw Pals
  - Pet therapy program lead by trained volunteers
  - Pre-screened pets visit patients and provide companionship
- Music Therapy
  - Evidence-based music therapy assesses the strengths and needs of the patient and designs a treatment plan that involves singing, listening to, or playing music
- Massage therapy
  - Uses touch to relieve pain, reduce stress and stimulate circulatory system
- Children's Bereavement Services
  - Provides developmentally appropriate coping mechanisms for children

**(6) Consistency with Plans. An applicant for a new Hospice program shall provide evidence in the application that the proposal is consistent with the needs of the community and other criteria contained in local health council plans and the State Health Plan. The application for a new Hospice program shall include letters from health organizations, social services organizations, and other entities within the proposed service area that endorse the applicant's development of a Hospice program.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** reiterates that it has received tremendous support for the project and provides numerous excerpts of its support letters throughout the application including letters/surveys from:

- Florida Department of Health — Pasco
- Area Agency on Aging — Pasco/Pinellas
- Hospitals
- Skilled Nursing Facilities
- Assisted Living Facilities
- Home Care Organizations
- Outreach Organizations
- University Representatives
- Physicians
- Community Members
- Business Leaders

The applicant notes that the letters reference a variety of reasons additional hospice services are needed in Pasco County and explain why the letter author believes Empath Pasco is uniquely qualified to meet the need and are on located on pages 121-134.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states that this was addressed in E1.a. noting that it has the support of various residents, health care providers, and institutions for its expansion of hospice services in Pasco County and has provided letters of support written by these parties that will attest to these endorsements. VITAS contends that it has recognized the specific needs of communities within Hospice Service Area 5A and will work directly with these residents and health professionals in Pasco County to develop its existing programs to meet the community's needs.

**b. Chapter 59C-1.0355, Florida Administrative Code contains the following general provisions and review criteria to be considered in reviewing hospice programs.**

- (1) Required Program Description (Rule 59C-1.0355(6), Florida Administrative Code): An applicant for a new hospice program shall provide a detailed program description in its certificate of need application, including:**
  - (a) Proposed staffing, including use of volunteers.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Pasco LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice, LLC (CON application #10772)** addresses its staff and volunteer's training, roles and duties in detail on the application's pages 134-140 adding that copies of its of job descriptions for positions that Empath Pasco will recruit in Pasco County are provided in Exhibit M. The applicant's Schedule 6A indicates it will have 26.70 total FTEs in year one and 36.80 total FTEs in year two.

The applicant confirms that its hospice services will be delivered by trained members of an interdisciplinary team comprised of nurses, physicians, social workers, chaplains, home health aides and volunteers adding that 54 percent of Empath Staff members have been employed by the company for three years or more and 38 percent for five years or more with the average tenure for nursing, social work/psychosocial and spiritual care staff being 5.6 years. Suncoast Hospice notes that 44 current Empath employees reside in Pasco County.

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Further, adult, and teen volunteers receive comprehensive training designed to prepare them for their role in hospice and will be used for hospice team, patient and family support which include:

- Organizational – office assistance, special events, resale shops, Corporate/Group Volunteer Program, Empath Partners in Care (EPIC), community outreach, Maintenance/Durable Medical Equipment Volunteer
- Patient and Family Support - companionship - including respite care (2-4 hour shifts for caregiver relief), transportation, help at home, Transitions (supportive presence), Vigil Volunteer Training, palliative arts support (pet visits , aromatherapy, Reiki, Music, and Pet Peace of Mind (PPOM)), Veterans Serving Veterans, Veterans Recognition Program (Empath HONORS), First Responder Recognition Program (Empath Tribute), Bereavement Volunteer Program, Telephone Support, Empathy Calls to Families, Children’s Program (support for ill children and their caregivers and siblings), community counseling, Perinatal Loss Program - Volunteer Doulas (support for the loss of a child during or shortly after birth), End of Life Doula Training: End of Life (EOL) Doula program in partnership with INELDA (International End of Life Doula Association), Suncoast PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) which includes an adult day center and volunteer support participants' homes
- Teen Volunteer Program - Cheer Team, Lifetime Legacies, Veterans History Project Community Story Days, Party Pals, Thoughtful Gestures, and Fundraising (Adopt-a-Family" bake and craft sales)

Empath's staff and volunteers’ awards, recognitions and certifications are listed on pages 139 and 140 of the application.

The applicant shares that it currently has academic affiliations with 58 schools/programs, encompassing a wide range of clinical and non-clinical disciplines which include Nursing/Nursing Assistant, Mental Health Counseling, Medical Residency, Social Work, Human Development, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Healthcare Administration, Public Health, and Chaplaincy. Within Pasco County, Empath Health has existing relationships with health professional training programs in Pasco County, including:

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- ✓ Keiser University: Nursing, Healthcare professions, Graduate nursing
- ✓ St. Leo University: Social work

Copies of job descriptions for positions that Empath Pasco will recruit in Pasco County are provided in Exhibit M. Copies of collaterals related to volunteer opportunities within Empath's Hospice Division are provided in Exhibit N. A full list of Empath Health's academic affiliations is provided in Exhibit O.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** notes that Schedule 6A shows its current total number of FTE staff and the FTE staff added by this project as 38 FTEs in year one (ending September 2025) and 68.10 FTEs in year two (ending September 2026). VITAS indicates volunteer staff hours will equal or exceed five percent of total direct care staff hours and in addition to core services, VITAS will provide physical/occupational, pet visits and music therapy.

**(b) Expected sources of patient referrals.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Pasco LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice, LLC (CON application #10772)** indicates that patient referrals will come from a variety of sources, including:

- ✓Physicians
- ✓Nursing homes
- ✓ALFs
- ✓Hospitals
- ✓Home health agencies
- ✓Families and friends
- ✓Patient self-referral
- ✓Insurers
- ✓Faith communities
- ✓Community social services organizations
- ✓Other Empath services/programs

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states that referrals will come from area physicians, hospitals, clergy, social service agencies, disease advocacy groups, nursing homes, homeless advocates, other health care providers, family members, and patients.

- (c) Projected number of admissions, by payer type, including Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance, self-pay, and indigent care patients for the first two years of operation.**

The tables below show the applicants projected admissions and patient days by payer source.

**5A Applicants Admissions by Payer Source  
Years One and Two**

<b>Year One</b>	<b>Suncoast Hospice of Pasco LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice, LLC (CON application #10772)</b>	<b>VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)</b>
Medicare	208	330
Medicaid	9	13
Indigent/Charity	0	6
Private Insurance/ Self-Pay	2	22
Com Ins	4	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>224*</b>	<b>371</b>
<b>Year Two</b>		
Medicare	374	512
Medicaid	16	20
Charity		10
Private Insurance/ Self-Pay	4	33
Com Ins	8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>575</b>

Sources: CON application #10772, page 141. \*Reviewer notes that the Total is 223, CON application #10773, page 137.

- (d) Projected number of admissions, by type of terminal illness, for the first two years of operation.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath  
Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)**

**Projected Admissions  
by Terminal Illness in Service Area 5A**

	<b>Year One</b>	<b>Year Two</b>
Cancer Under 65	13	23
Cancer 65+	20	36
Non-Cancer Under 65	11	20
Non-Cancer 65+	180	323
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>402</b>

Sources: CON application #10772, page 141.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON  
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**Projected Admissions by Terminal Illness in Service Area 5A**

<b>Terminal Illness</b>	<b>Year One Admissions</b>	<b>Year Two Admissions</b>
Cancer	91	141
HIV/AIDS	1	1
Respiratory	33	52
Cardiac	66	103
Alzheimer's/Dementia	34	53
Cerebrovascular/Stroke	108	168
Other	38	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>575</b>

Source: CON application #10773, Exhibit 49, page 137.

- (e) **Projected number of admissions, by two age groups, under 65 and 65 or older, for the first two years of operations.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772) and VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773):**

<b>Year One</b>	<b>Suncoast Hospice of Pasco LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice, LLC</b>	<b>VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida</b>
Under 65	24	41
65+	200	330
<b>Total Hospice Admissions</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>371</b>
<b>Year Two</b>		
Under 65	43	63
65+	359	512
<b>Total Hospice Admissions</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>575</b>

Sources: CON application #10772, page 142. CON application #10773, Exhibit 50 page 138.

- (f) **Identification of the services that will be provided directly by hospice staff and volunteers and those that will be provided through contractual arrangements.**

*Pertinent to this rule preference, the Agency notes the following:*

- **Section 400.609 (1) (a) & (b) Florida Statutes, states (a):**
  - *The hospice care team shall directly provide the following core services: nursing services, social work services, pastoral or counseling services, dietary counseling, and bereavement counseling services. Physician services may be provided by*

*the hospice directly or through contract. A hospice may also use contracted staff if necessary to supplement hospice employees in order to meet the needs of patients during periods of peak patient loads or under extraordinary circumstances*

*(b):*

- *Each hospice must also provide or arrange for such additional services as are needed to meet the palliative and support needs of the patient and family. These services may include, but are not limited to, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, massage therapy, home health aide services, infusion therapy, provision of medical supplies and durable medical equipment, day care, homemaker and chore services, and funeral services*

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** lists 24 core services that Empath Pasco's hospice staff deliver directly as well as another 24 administrative services that the applicant indicates are provided in-house, by the parent – Empath Health (pages 142 and 143 of the application).

According to the applicant, the depth and breadth of programs and services offered by Empath Health provide Empath Pasco with all of the support and infrastructure with which to provide high quality hospice services that are immediately responsive to the needs of the patient/family, without delay.

The reviewer notes the applicant does not list contracted services.

**Delivered directly:**

- Care/Case Management
- Hospice Home Care
- Bereavement Services
- Nursing Services
- Social Services
- Dietary Counseling
- Spiritual Counseling/Chaplains

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- Veterans Services
- Pediatric Services
- Patient Intake: Evaluation, Plan of Care
- Evening and Weekend Care
- Infusion
- Pharmacy
- DME/Medical Supplies
- Physician Services/Medical Director Patient and Family Education/Support
- Volunteer Services
- Hospice Inpatient Care
- Quality Measurement and Reporting
- Infection Control
- Integrative Therapies
- Professional/Community Outreach and Education
- Patient/Family Surveys
- Palliative Care (non-CON service)
  - Hospital-Based
  - Community-Based

### **Empath Health administrative functions delivered:**

- Billing and Collections
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Staffing, Recruitment
- Education/Training
- Information Technology
- Risk Management
- Managed Care Contracting
- Marketing and Public Relations
- Foundation
- Legal Services
- Compliance
- Real Estate/Leasing
- Purchasing/Procurement
- Contract Administration
- Maintenance
- Reporting/Decision Support
- PBX and Switchboard (24/7/365)
- Medical Records
- Governance Support
- Licensure/Accreditation

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- Website Management
- Advocacy/Public Policy
- Policies and Procedures

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** responds that its services that are considered core services, including physician services, nursing services, social work services, pastoral counseling, and dietary counseling, will be provided by VITAS staff. Further, VITAS notes that in addition to the core services offered by the Hospice interdisciplinary team, it will provide Physical/Occupational therapy, Respiratory Therapy, music therapy as well pet visits. The applicant adds that it will have a licensed music therapist. VITAS may utilize supplemental staff to provide these functions, including massage therapy. Volunteers will be used for pet visits and music therapy.

**(g) Proposed arrangements for providing inpatient care.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** states that no inpatient beds are proposed in this CON application, and it will arrange for inpatient care through contractual arrangements with Pasco County hospitals and nursing homes, other facilities to meet the needs of its patients. Furthermore, it will pursue contracts with BayCare hospitals in Pasco County and Life Care Center of New Port Richey (a skilled nursing facility) for the provision of general inpatient hospice care adding that letters of support from Lou Galdieri, Co-Chief Operating Officer of BayCare, as well as Lee Edmister, Administrator of Life Care Center of New Port Richey, are provided in Exhibit 1. Further, Empath Pasco will seek contracts for the provision of hospice care within additional local nursing homes, as well as other hospitals in the county.

Suncoast Hospice includes sample inpatient agreements in Exhibit F and projects that 2.0 percent of its patient days will be for inpatient services in Pasco County (also shown on the application's Schedule 5).

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states it will establish inpatient agreements within the service area with existing hospital and nursing home facilities. Sample inpatient agreements included in the application's Tab 37.

- (h) Proposed number of inpatient beds that will be located in a freestanding inpatient facility, in hospitals, and in nursing homes.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** states it will contract with existing health care facilities for inpatient beds when needed.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states that it will establish inpatient agreements within the service area noting that Hillside Health and Rehab Center has provided a letter of support confirming their willingness to contract with VITAS for inpatient level care. VITAS maintains that inpatient beds will be contracted as needed and the exact number of beds has not been determined and notes that the total number of inpatient days projected in year two is 567. The applicant maintains that since it will only pay for the bed days used, the expense budget does not change with the number of beds under contract.

- (i) Circumstances under which a patient would be admitted to an inpatient bed.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** indicates that it will base inpatient admissions on the patient's physical condition, which fluctuates with time, and the home care situation adding that the patient, family, physician, and hospice interdisciplinary team will participate in the evaluation of appropriate levels of care and the decision regarding the provision of care in an inpatient unit. The applicant states that patients may be admitted if pain and/or other medical symptoms cannot be effectively managed at home or wherever the patient is receiving hospice care which is often a temporary situation to help adjust the patient's medications or reassess and

regulate the services to be provided and that the patient once stabilized typically returns home with a discharge plan that includes specific caregiver structure Suncoast Hospice offers seven typical patient examples on pages 144-146.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** indicates that it will base inpatient admissions on a patient's physical condition, family caregiver capacity and patient wishes.

The applicant states that inpatient episodes are for respite care or stays of duration up to five days. VITAS maintains that patients will be admitted if they are experiencing pain or symptoms that cannot be managed at home in order to adjust medication and reassess care. The applicant notes that once a patient is stabilized, they will be discharged. VITAS indicates that it will deliver Intensive Comfort Care services (continuous home care) to patients in order to avoid admission to an inpatient unit when appropriate. The applicant notes that continuous home care allows for patients to remain at home during the end-of-life.

**Both applicants** detail their understanding of the criteria to be met to admit a patient for inpatient care.

**(j) Provisions for serving persons without primary caregivers at home.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** states that some patients are unable to develop a caregiver network (to maintain in-home hospice care) and/or that some hospice patients may not be physically or mentally able to remain at home and receive hospice services. The applicant states that if a patient is unable to care for him/herself and has no caregiver support, Empath may recommend that the patient enter an ALF, nursing home, or inpatient hospice facility and that hospice staff and volunteers will continue to provide hospice care in these settings and when patients require inpatient hospice services, it will work to establish and expand relationships with SA nursing homes, ALFs and hospitals.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states it will assist the patient in developing a network of caregivers to assist the patient or recommend that qualified adult sitter services be obtained should that not pose a financial hardship. VITAS states it will implement its Solo Agers Outreach Program to address the needs of SA elderly patients or live alone or do not have family/caregiver support.

**(k) Arrangements for the provision of bereavement services.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** indicates Empath Health has a wide variety of bereavement service options for specific populations within the communities that it serves. Empath bereavement services include social workers, counselors, bereavement specialists and trained volunteers, as well as Community Counseling Program counselors. Staff members include Licensed clinical social workers (LCWS), Licensed mental health counselors (LMHC) and Master-prepared social workers and counselors who are license-eligible. Its bereavement services are comprised of four areas of support:

1. Telephone calls to the bereaved caregiver throughout the year
2. Mailings - a letter with support material is sent to everyone identified in the family system that may benefit and desire to receive these mailings
3. One-on-one counseling throughout the 13-month post-death period with an LCSW or LMHC and
4. Grief support groups throughout the year address the grieving needs of the variety of bereaved individuals and circumstances each has, such as (spouse loss retirement age, spouse loss working age, sudden loss, general grief, specialty loss groups around the holidays, etc.)

Empath points out that grief support groups are provided for Spanish-speaking persons by qualified social workers and counselors. The applicant also provides:

- Community Service Memorials
- Community Counseling Center

Empath offers brief narratives and descriptions (on pages 147 - 154 of the application) regarding:

- Serious illness support and grief counseling
- Individual and group counseling
- Traumatic, sudden loss counseling
- Crisis intervention counseling
- Perinatal loss counseling and support
- School-based support groups for bereavement training and education
- Child and family support groups/presentations/retreats

Empath emphasizes that bereavement programs are not one size fits all and the exact types of programs to be offered in Pasco County are based on the different racial/ethnic communities, religious communities, the veterans community and pediatric patients and families.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** indicates that its staff and volunteers provide grief support and bereavement services for survivors, as needed, and requested and are available from the time of admission until the primary tasks of mourning are accomplished. Further, support will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week by a trained staff member on-call schedule, accessible through a toll-free number. VITAS notes that its bereavement services are described in greater detail in the Project Summary section and examples of bereavement services are included in the application's TAB 31.

**(1) Proposed community education activities concerning hospice programs.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** contends that as a comprehensive model of hospice, Empath Pasco will provide community, consumer, and professional education services as an integral part of its mission to serve everyone in the community affected by life-limiting illness, caregiving, and bereavement. The applicant states that specific to Pasco County, it has developed a comprehensive strategy to provide outreach and education regarding hospice services, advance directives, care

navigation and bereavement services. Suncoast Hospice reiterates its use of the Empath Mobile Access to Care to “take education right into the communities.”

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** bullets five community education efforts:

- A Spanish speaking VITAS Representative committed to providing hospice outreach and education
- Advanced Care Planning for residents of homeless shelters
- Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician events focused on Cardiac, Pulmonary, and Cancer diagnoses
- Bridging the Gap Panel Discussion and Toolkit
- Goals of Care Preceptorship and Certification Program

Further, VITAS has historically participated both financially and through employee volunteerism in programs and services which are within these areas of interest: Education, Health, Civic, and Culture/Arts -- examples include:

- Broward Homeless Partnership
- Florida Breast Cancer Coalition
- Project Yes
- Make-A-Wish Foundation
- Charity Challenge
- Children's Bereavement Center
- Adopt-A-Classroom
- Anti-Defamation League
- Coast Guard Foundation
- Community Partnership for the Homeless
- Elizabeth Glasser Pediatric AIDS Foundation
- Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center
- Foundation for Hospice in Sub-Saharan Africa (recently renamed Global Partners in Care)
- Goodwill Industries
- The Duke Institute of Care at the End of Life
- Juvenile Diabetes
- Kristi House
- Miami-Dade Community College
- People for the American Way Foundation

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- NAACP
- National Conference of Communities and Justice
- People Acting for Community Together
- Sommerville Residence for the Homeless
- United Way
- Women's Fund
- Jewish Family Services
- American Heart Association

VITAS shares that it created an array of educational brochures and materials concerning hospice care, which are included in the application's TAB 38.

**(m) Fundraising activities.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** states that Pasco County fundraising activities will be coordinated by the existing Suncoast Hospice Foundation and stresses the foundation fills the gap between reimbursable and non-reimbursable expenses assisting “those who are not insured; those who need more services than insurance covers; those who cannot afford to pay; those who have family members affected by a patient's health condition; and those who need assistance with needs outside or in addition to their direct medical diagnosis”.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** maintains that it will not solicit charitable contributions from patients, family, or friends relating to its services in Subdistrict 5A, nor will it engage in fundraising events for its program. Further, any unsolicited donations received will be given to VITAS Community Connections, a non-profit organization that uses funds to provide donations and grants to local organizations and families, ensuring that all money goes back into the local community.

- c. Rule 59-1.0355(8) Florida Administrative Code: Semi-Annual Utilization Reports. Each hospice program shall report utilization information to the Agency or its designee on or before July 20th of each year and January 20th of the following year.**

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** states it will comply with all reporting requirements, reporting results to the Agency or its designee, by the required timeframes.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states it will continue to comply with all reporting requirements as it does for its existing hospice services in Florida.

**Both applicants** (Suncoast on CON application #10772 pages 115-134) and (VITAS on CON application #10773 pages 127-135) discussed hospice licensure standards in Rule 59A-38 Florida Administrative Code, demonstrating their understanding of these standards.

### **3. Statutory Review Criteria**

- a. Is need for the project evidenced by the availability, quality of care, accessibility and extent of utilization of existing health care facilities and health services in the applicant's service area? ss. 408.035(1), (2) and (5), Florida Statutes.**

As previously stated in item E.1.a. of this report, per Volume 50, Number 23, of the Florida Administrative Register, dated February 2, 2024, need was published for a hospice program Service Area 5A (Pasco County) for the July 2025 hospice planning horizon. Therefore, the co-batched applicants are applying in response to published need. SA 5A is currently served by:

- Accentcare Hospice & Palliative Care of Pasco County, which has its main office in Wesley Chapel (Pasco County)
- Gulfside Hospice, Inc. has a main office in Land O Lakes, a satellite office in New Port Richey and a satellite and a 14-bed inpatient hospice facility in Zephyrhills. Gulfside also has an approved CON (#10713) to establish a 24-bed inpatient hospice in new Port Richey that is under construction as of May 2024.
- HPH Hospice has two satellite offices in Pasco County, one in Wesley Chapel and one in New Port Richey, where it also has a 48-bed inpatient hospice facility.

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Pasco County has 10 hospitals with 1,619 licensed beds, 18 SNFs with 2,174 beds, 48 ALFs with 3,548 licensed beds, and 46 home health agencies.

SA 5A’s CYs 2019—2023 hospice admissions by provider are shown in the table below. AccentCare Hospice & Palliative Care of Pasco County was licensed on April 14, 2020, as Seasons Hospice & Palliative Care of Pasco County.

**Service Area 5A (Pasco County)  
Hospice Admissions CY 2019—CY 2023**

<b>Hospice</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019*</b>
AccentCare Hospice & Palliative Care of Pasco	459	310	266	158	0
Gulfside Hospice, Inc.	3,134	3,134	3,524	2,914	2,696
HPH Hospice	1,376	1,544	1,650	1,801	1,766
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,969</b>	<b>4,988</b>	<b>5,440</b>	<b>4,873</b>	<b>4,462</b>

Source: Agency for Health Care Administration Florida Need Projections for Hospice Programs, issued for the referenced time frames with the exception in the “Note” below.

Note: \*CY 2019 includes 2,168 July-December 2019 admissions which were not published due to the cancellation of the July 2020 batching cycle. Gulfside Hospice, Inc. had 1,300 and HPH Hospice 868 admissions during July-December 2019.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** major need justifications are briefly described as well as within item E.1.a. of this report which has these in more detail.

- The large and growing population in the area
- The aging population in the area
- Increasing numbers of deaths of Pasco residents and higher than average death rates for certain causes of death compared to the state
- The high percentage of Pasco County resident outmigration to other Florida providers outside of the county
- The low discharge rate directly to hospice from certain Pasco acute care hospitals to hospice programs for Medicare enrollees to who die within six months of discharge from a hospital in Pasco County
- The large percentage of Medicare enrollees who die within six months of discharge from certain hospitals in Pasco County but never access hospice services.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states that its application is in response to a published fixed need and as previously discussed it maintains that its proposal seeks to address the entirety of the needs of the terminally ill population, regardless of age, race, gender, disability, or income level.

Specific groups to be served through community outreach and programs include, but are not limited to:

- Patients aged 65 years and older who have noncancer diagnoses
  - Respiratory conditions
  - Cardiac conditions
  - Memory loss
  - Other patient groups are specifically described
- Minority populations, including:
  - Hispanic residents
  - Black residents
  - LGBTQ+ residents
  - Jewish residents
- Veterans
- The homeless
- Impoverished
- Food insecure
- High acuity patients who wish to remain in their homes for hospice services.

VITAS states that it is a knowledgeable provider within the state of Florida with a history of providing services to all persons regardless of diagnosis or payor source and will serve patients covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and other third-party programs as well as self-pay and charity patients. Exhibit 48 has its projected SA 5A payor mix. VITAS reiterates that it also agrees to accept conditions as reflected in Schedule C and commits to providing an array of programs and initiatives to remove barriers and enhance access to hospice care.

- b. Does the applicant have a history of providing quality of care? Has the applicant demonstrated the ability to provide quality care? ss. 408.035(3), Florida Statutes.**

The Agency maintains a Hospice Quality Reporting Program (HQRP) website at <https://www.floridahealthfinder.gov/Hospice/Hospice.aspx>. In this website, the Agency shares hospice quality characteristics through the following Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' reporting requirements found in the assessment sources and survey instruments of:

- CAHPS® (Patients and Family Experience Measures-Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Provider and Systems) during April 1, 2021—March 31, 2023
- HIS (Quality of Patient Care Measures-Hospice Item Set) during April 1, 2022—March 31, 2023.

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Below is the publicly available HQRP information, as presented in the referenced website for each of the co-batched applicants (or the parent/manager and corresponding affiliates), with current licensed Florida hospices that had ratings as of March 31, 2023.

**CAHPS Data  
April 1, 2021 through March 31, 2023**

Applicant/ Hospice Provider	Com. with family	Getting timely help	Treating patient with respect	Emotional & spiritual support	Help for pain & symptoms	Train family to care for patient	Rating of this hospice	Willing to recommend this hospice
Empath Tidewell	81%	77%	90%	89%	73%	71%	81%	88%
Suncoast Hospice	78%	72%	88%	89%	70%	68%	80%	86%
Suncoast - Hillsborough	80%	79%	90%	85%	77%	71%	78%	84%
<b>Empath Avg.</b>	<b>79.7%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>89.3%</b>	<b>87.7%</b>	<b>73.3%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>79.7%</b>	<b>86%</b>
VITAS	71%	64%	83%	86%	67%	64%	72%	76%
<b>State Average</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>82%</b>

Source: <https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/?redirect=true&providerType=Hospice> and Florida Health Finder <https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/?redirect=true&providerType=Hospice>

Note: The reviewer does not include Hospice of Marion County, Inc., as Agency records indicate it merged with Empath effective February 10, 2023.

The applicant’s parent (Empath affiliates during the reporting periods) and VITAS Florida hospices Quality of Patient Care Measures-Hospice Item Set’s rating on patients who got an assessment on all seven HIS quality measures are shown below.

Hospice Provider	Patients Who Got an Assessment of All 7 HIS Quality Measures	Hospice Visits in the Last Days of Life by RN or Med. SW
Empath Tidewell Hospice (22910034)	97.6%	52.2%
Suncoast Hospice (22910016)	99.6%	66.6%
Suncoast Hospice Of Hillsborough, LLC (22960127)	99.1%	Not Available
<b>Empath Average</b>	<b>98.8%</b>	<b>59.4%</b>
VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida – (22910014 - 22960086 - 22960083)	96.1%	41.0%
<b>State Average</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>54.5%</b>

Source: Medicare.gov <https://www.floridahealthfinder.gov/Hospice/Hospice.aspx> and Florida Health Finder <https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/?redirect=true&providerType=Hospice>

Note: The reviewer does not include Hospice of Marion County, Inc., as Agency records indicate it merged with Empath effective February 10, 2023.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** maintains that the parent, Empath Health, specifically its Hospice Division, has a long history of the provision of high-quality hospice care to the residents of Pinellas, Hillsborough, DeSoto, Charlotte, Manatee, Sarasota, Polk, Hardee, Highlands and Marion Counties adding that of the five hospice agencies within Empath Health's Hospice Division:

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- ✓ All agencies are licensed by AHCA
- ✓ Suncoast Hospice is one of only a handful of hospices nationwide to hold Joint Commission Accreditation and/or Certification for hospice, home health, community-based palliative care, and pharmacy programs
- ✓ Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough and Hospice of Marion County are accredited by the Joint Commission
- ✓ Tidewell Hospice holds Community Health Accreditation Partner (CHAP) accreditation with deemed status
- ✓ Empath Hospice is not yet accredited.

Suncoast Hospice states that the Quality Strategy serves as a road map towards becoming a High Reliability Organization ("HRO") with a commitment from Empath Health leadership to ensure robust process improvement along with a culture of safety.

The applicant reflects all programs and aligns the commitment to becoming a High Reliability Organization (HRO), avoiding areas of duplication, overlap and inefficiencies that would undoubtedly occur if these plans were addressed separately and maintains that Empath Health Quality and Safety Strategy meets the Quality Assessment Process Improvement and Quality Management / Utilization Review ("QM/UR") requirements of all regulatory and funding bodies including but not limited to:

- Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough
- Suncoast Hospice
- Tidewell Hospice
- Empath Hospice
- Hospice of Marion County
- Empath Home Health
- Suncoast PACE
- Empath Partners in Care and
- Empath Community Health Services

Suncoast Hospice discusses Empath Health's Hospice Division state and national scores on the both the Hospice Item Set ("HIS") and Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems ("CAHPS") Hospice Survey and provides tables to account for results of

- Family Caregiver Experience Global Measures Comparison of Empath Health Hospice Division, Florida/National Averages and Existing 5A Providers, April 1, 2021, through March 31, 2023

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- HIS Measures Comparison of Empath Health Hospice Division, Florida/National Averages and Existing 5A Providers, April 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023 (HIS Comprehensive Assessment) January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2022 (Hospice Visits and Hospice Care Index)

The applicant notes that Empath Health Hospice Division agencies scored higher than the state average and every Pasco County provider for the Star Rating and willingness to recommend measure as well as the state and national averages, while outscoring or is consistent with existing Pasco County providers on the three HIS quality measures (HIS comprehensive assessment, hospice visits in last days of life and hospice care index).

Suncoast Hospice indicates its “Willing to Recommend This Hospice” was higher than the state average of 84 with a score of 87 percent which includes all Suncoast Hospice, Tidewell Hospice and Hospice of Marion County agencies noting that Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough has no available CMS scoring yet. Further, it’s HIS Comprehensive Assessment scores also exceeded the state average of 96.8 with a score of 98.3 percent which outscores the existing providers and national scores.

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Hospice Star Rating</b>	<b>Willingness to Recommend</b>
Empath Health Hospice Division	<b>***</b>	87% (86%)
AccentCare Pasco	<b>***</b>	82% (84%)
Gulfside Hospice	<b>**</b>	80% (81%)
HPH Hospice	<b>**</b>	81% (80%)
Florida	NA	82%
National	NA	84%

Source: CON application #10772, page 167, Figure 61

Note: The reviewer notes that the data in parentheses indicates the newest data for the applicant affiliates minus Hospice of Marion County, existing SA providers, state and national data.

<b>Provider</b>	<b>HIS Comprehensive Assessment</b>	<b>Hospice Visits in Last Days of Life</b>	<b>Hospice Care Index HCI</b>
Empath Health Hospice Division	98.3 (98.8%)	57.6 (58.9%)	9.8 (10)
AccentCare Pasco	97.9 (98%)	56.5	10
Gulfside Hospice	94.7 (95.4%)	54.7	10
HPH Hospice	96.8 (97.4%)	34.9	10
Florida	96.8 (97%)	54.5	9.5
National	91.6 (91.5%)	47.9	8.8

Source: CON application #10772, page 167, Figure 62

Note: The reviewer notes that the data in parentheses indicates the newest data for the applicant affiliates minus Hospice of Marion County, Inc., existing providers, state and national data.

Empath discusses its management commitment to quality and provides an extensive list of awards and recognitions dating from the 1980s to 2024 on the application's pages 168—174.

Empath Health operates licensed hospice programs in SA 5B as Suncoast Hospice, SA 6A as the applicant and SAs 6C, 8A and 8D as Empath TideWell Hospice. Empath Health affiliates also include Hospice of Marion County, Inc. in SA 3B (effective 2/10/23).

Agency records indicate that for the three-year period ending April 23, 2024, Hospice of Marion County (22910026—merged 2/10/23), Empath Hospice, LLC (22960133—licensed 8/20/23), Suncoast Hospice (22910016), and Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC (22960127—licensed 12/17/21) had no substantiated complaints. Empath Tidewell Hospice (22910034) had one substantiated complaint with two categories cited, one in the Resident/Patient/Client Rights and one Administration/Personnel categories.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)**

states that it is a leader in end-of-life care and meets the objectives of this statutory requirement. “VITAS Healthcare by the Numbers (Nationwide, 2023)” are provided on CON application #10773, page 16:

- 80,689 patients served
- Average daily census (ADC) of 18,613 patients
- 50 hospice programs in 15 states and DC
- 10,656 employees including
- 5,700 volunteers

VITAS provided \$9.64 million in charity care to hospice patients in CY 2023 and nationwide VITAS provided \$11.9 million of charity care in 2023. VITAS also provides its “Florida Overview (CY 2023)” which states:

- 46,661 patients served
- 4.4 million days of care
- 1.5 percent of Medicare patient days as continuous care
- Over 70,000 continuous care days of care provided
- Average daily census of 12,181 patients
- 7,000+ employees and 2,531 nurses
- 215 interdisciplinary teams
- 885 active volunteers
- Provides 24-hour clinical staff through TeleCare Program
- \$9.6 million in charity care

VITAS Healthcare states having the following mission, values, and vision on page 19 of the Project Summary:

- Mission
  - VITAS is a growing family of hospices providing the highest quality human services, products and case management to terminally ill and other appropriate patients and their families with measurable advantages for the patient, the family, the medical community, the employee, and the stockholder
- Values
  - Improving the quality of life, empowerment and personal dignity are fundamental values and principles at VHC. VITAS' values are instilled in all of its employees, from the corporate office to the field staff members.
  - VITAS Healthcare Values
    - Patients and families come first.
    - We take care of each other.
    - I'll do my best today and do even better tomorrow.
    - I am proud to make a difference.
- Vision
  - For over 45 years, VITAS has advocated for the rights of terminally ill patients and their families. VITAS believes that patients should be apprised of their clinical prognosis and be involved in the decision-making process that determines how their end-of-life care is provided.

VITAS contends that it provides high-quality services by investing in the training, education, and treatment of staff, physicians, patients, and families. Further, it continuously updates its internal standards which are applied to all VITAS hospice programs across the country. VITAS confirms that on May 18, 2023, all VITAS programs in Florida became CHAP accredited with all of its nationwide programs projected to become CHAP accredited by September 2024. The applicant assures that it will seek accreditation by CHAP as part of the Medicare certification process and the SA 5A program will adhere to the same policies, procedures, and standards.

VITAS states that its SA 5A Governing Body will implement a quality assurance program consistent with its existing programs in Florida and will conduct continuing, comprehensive, and integrated assessments of the quality and appropriateness of care provided, including inpatient care, home care, and care provided under arrangement.

VITAS notes that its Quality Improvement ("QI") Program is based on the VITAS Quality Management Program, which features continuous monitoring and periodic analysis of both the quality of service (including staff competency, visit frequency, continuity of care, pharmacy management, documentation, and compliance policies and procedures) focuses on doing the right things while the quality of outcomes (patient comfort, patient quality of life, and patient/family satisfaction focuses on the consequences for patients and families.

The applicant notes that it has a comprehensive QAPI program that continuously monitors and assesses the quality of services being provided to patients and families and also monitors palliative outcomes, CAHPS outcomes, and Hospice Item Set (HIS) data, as required by CMS.

VITAS states that it provides high-quality care through measuring and assessing patients' pain levels. Further, the team managers can review daily the most recent pain scores for all patients on a team with weekly reviews by the entire team. The applicant notes that its team has accurate, continuous information from the patients about their level of comfort and can address it by modifying interventions. Additionally, the hospice management team is provided with detailed reports of pain management for patients admitted with mild, moderate, and severe pain on a quarterly basis.

VITAS ensures that it offers employment to appropriately qualified candidates that most closely match its established job criteria and the hospice needs and provides ongoing education and staff development to maintain and improve competencies and knowledge resulting in the quality and competence of administrative and clinical staff.

The applicant notes that its information technology system enables the General Manager to ensure all staff meets their required continuing education credits and that:

- RNs, home health aides, LPNs, and social workers are encouraged to become certified in Hospice and Palliative Care and are provided with a salary increase and reimbursed for any testing fees if they do so.
- Chaplains must have a Master of Divinity or equivalent graduate degree from an accredited seminary or theological school.
- Social workers must have a master's degree or be licensed clinical social workers.

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VITAS reiterates that it is committed to ensuring its staff in SA 5A are well-trained to provide the best possible care and conditions this application on:

- a. The Medical Director covering Service Area 5A will be Board-Certified in Hospice and Palliative Care Medicine or certified through the Hospice Medical Director Certification Board.
- b. VITAS will award a salary increase and will reimburse any testing fees for RNs, LPNs, home health aides, and social workers who become certified in Hospice and Palliative Care.

VITAS indicates that recognizing the importance of providing culturally relevant care it will build a diverse and highly skilled work force through referrals, networking/career events, and a mix of advertising and social media outreach and it participates in diversity recruitment efforts as part of its rigorous recruitment strategy. The applicant states that it complies with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and provides equal employment opportunity for all qualified applicants and employees without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, non-job-related disability, Vietnam-era and disabled veteran status, sexual orientation, age, or gender.

VITAS briefly discusses its competitive benefits package and its management tool (VITAS CARES--Coach, Assist, Recognize, Engage and Satisfy) and indicates that VITAS CARES has contributed to lower employee turnover and created an environment of appreciation and recognition. VITAS maintains that it will assess every patient within 24 hours of admission to any of its programs and that the Interdisciplinary Team visits patients in their place of residence.

VITAS restates that it is focused on continuously enhancing its education, training, and development planning process, which includes an annual and mandatory review of the company's compliance and HIPAA policy. Further, VITAS offers numerous training courses (e.g., Taking Care of Me—Managing Stress While Providing Quality Care) to ensure staff can cope with the emotional demands of their work. Live training and training through its Intranet system, INET, is provided where hospice aides can access various self-study modules that can be printed and completed at their convenience and/or accessed from remote locations. Each module addresses a different patient care topic which is followed by a quiz that a grade of 80 percent or better must be obtained to receive continuing education credit.

VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida had 12 substantiated complaints with 14 categories cited during the three-year period ending April 23, 2024. Each substantiated complaint can encompass multiple complaint categories. Below is a table to account for the substantiated complaints by the applicable complaint category.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida  
Substantiated Complaint History by Category  
Three-Year Period Ending April 23, 2024**

<b>Complaint Category</b>	<b>Number Substantiated</b>
Quality of Care/Treatment	<b>5</b>
Resident/Patient/Client Rights	<b>5</b>
Administration/Personnel	<b>2</b>
Falsification of Records/Reports	<b>1</b>
State Licensure	<b>1</b>

Source: AHCA Substantiated Complaint History

VITAS provides hospice services in SAs 1, 2A, 3A, 3C, 3E, 4A, 4B, 6B, 7A, 7B, 7C, 8B, 8C, 9B, 9C, 10 and 11.

Since its CHAP accreditation on May 18, 2023, VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida has had one substantiated complaint with two categories cited—Quality of Care/Treatment and Administration/Personnel through April 23, 2024.

- c. What resources, including health manpower, management personnel, and funds for capital and operating expenditures, are available for project accomplishment and operation? ss. 408.035(4), Florida Statutes.**

**Applies to both applicants** - The purpose of our analysis for this section is to determine if the applicant has access to the funds necessary to fund this and all capital projects. Our review includes an analysis of the short and long-term position of the applicant, parent, or other related parties who will fund the project. The analysis of the short and long-term position is intended to provide some level of objective assurance on the likelihood that funding will be available. The stronger the short-term position, the more likely cash on hand or cash flows could be used to fund the project. The stronger the long-term position, the more likely that debt financing could be achieved, if necessary, to fund the project. We also calculate working capital (current assets less current liabilities) a measure of excess liquidity that could be used to fund capital projects.

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Historically we have compared all applicant financial ratios regardless of type to benchmarks established from financial ratios collected from Florida acute care hospitals. While not always a perfect match to a particular CON project it is a reasonable proxy for health care related entities.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)**

<b>10772 - Empath Health (Parent)</b>		
	<b>Sep-23</b>	<b>Sep-22</b>
Current Assets	\$66,389,294	\$79,375,803
Total Assets	\$441,515,303	\$376,727,240
Current Liabilities	\$47,900,268	\$45,208,870
Total Liabilities	\$59,826,307	\$54,174,541
Net Assets	<b>\$381,688,996</b>	<b>\$322,552,699</b>
Total Revenues	\$421,909,681	\$284,164,580
Excess of Revenues Over Expenses	\$59,032,598	<b>(\$50,282,224)</b>
Cash Flow from Operations	<b>(\$14,612,264)</b>	\$379,480
<b>Short-Term Analysis</b>		
Current Ratio (CA/CL)	1.4	1.8
Cash Flow to Current Liabilities (CFO/CL)	-30.51%	0.84%
<b>Long-Term Analysis</b>		
Long-Term Debt to Net Assets (TL-CL/NA)	3.1%	2.8%
Total Margin (ER/TR)	13.99%	-17.69%
<b>Measure of Available Funding</b>		
Working Capital	<b>\$18,489,026</b>	<b>\$34,166,933</b>

<b>Position</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Moderately Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b>
Current Ratio	above 3	3 - 2.3	2.3 - 1.7	1.7 - 1.0	< 1.0
Cash Flow to Current Liabilities	>150%	150%-100%	100% - 50%	50% - 0%	< 0%
Debt to Equity	0% - 10%	10%-35%	35%-65%	65%-95%	> 95% or < 0%
Total Margin	> 12%	12% - 8.5%	8.5% - 5.5%	5.5% - 0%	< 0%

**Capital Requirements and Funding:**

On Schedule 2, the applicant indicates capital projects totaling \$824,670, which includes this project (\$799,670) and contingency (\$25,000). The applicant indicates on Schedule 3 of its application that funding for the project will be by related company financing. With \$26 million in cash and cash equivalents, the parent has sufficient resources to fund this project and all capital expenditures.

**Conclusion:**

Funding for this project and the entire capital budget should be available as needed.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)**

<b>10773 - Vitas Healthcare Corporation of Florida</b>		
	<b>Dec-22</b>	<b>Dec-21</b>
Current Assets	\$59,519,798	\$55,386,263
Total Assets	\$370,068,250	\$1,019,895,291
Current Liabilities	\$61,267,643	\$41,976,221
Total Liabilities	\$129,091,206	\$86,019,107
Net Assets	<b>\$240,977,044</b>	<b>\$933,876,184</b>
Total Revenues	\$719,392,644	\$710,744,055
Excess of Revenues Over Expenses	\$128,874,437	\$143,484,721
Cash Flow from Operations	\$82,462,667	\$113,771,448
<b>Short-Term Analysis</b>		
Current Ratio (CA/CL)	1.0	1.3
Cash Flow to Current Liabilities (CFO/CL)	134.59%	271.04%
<b>Long-Term Analysis</b>		
Long-Term Debt to Net Assets (TL-CL/NA)	28.1%	4.7%
Total Margin (ER/TR)	17.91%	20.19%
<b>Measure of Available Funding</b>		
Working Capital	<b>(\$1,747,845)</b>	<b>\$13,410,042</b>

<b>Position</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Moderately Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b>
Current Ratio	above 3	3 - 2.3	2.3 - 1.7	1.7 - 1.0	< 1.0
Cash Flow to Current Liabilities	>150%	150%-100%	100% - 50%	50% - 0%	< 0%
Debt to Equity	0% - 10%	10%-35%	35%-65%	65%-95%	> 95% or < 0%
Total Margin	> 12%	12% - 8.5%	8.5% - 5.5%	5.5% - 0%	< 0%

**Capital Requirements and Funding:**

On Schedule 2, the applicant indicates capital projects totaling \$17,25,432, which includes this project (\$1,366,639), CON 10780 (\$1,155,942) and current year capex (\$14,682,852). The applicant indicates on Schedule 3 of its application that funding for the project will be by operating cash flows. With \$82 million in cash flows from operations, the applicant has sufficient resources to fund this project and all capital expenditures.

**Conclusion:**

Funding for this project and the entire capital budget should be available as needed.

**d. What is the immediate and long-term financial feasibility of the proposal? ss. 408.035 (6), Florida Statutes**

**Applies to both applicants:** The immediate and long-term financial feasibility of the project is tied to expected profitability. Profitability for hospice is driven by two factors, volume of patients and length of stay/condition of the patient. A new hospice program in a SA with published need is more likely than not to be financially feasible since patient volume and mix is presumed to be available in sufficient amounts to sustain a new program. The focus of our review will be on the reasonableness of projections, specifically the revenue.

The vast majority of hospice days are paid by Medicare (Medicaid is the next largest payer with similar reimbursement rates). As such, revenue is predictable by day and service type. Schedule 7 includes revenue by service type. We have divided the applicant's projected revenues by the estimated Medicare reimbursement rates for each level of service in year two to estimate the total patient days that would be generated by that level of revenue. The results were then compared to the applicant's estimated number of patient days. Calculated patient days that approximate the applicant's projected patient days are considered reasonable and support the applicant's assumptions of feasibility. Calculated patient days that vary widely from the applicant's projected patient days call into question the applicant's profitability assumptions and feasibility. The results of the calculations are summarized below.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772):**

**CON Action Numbers: 10772 & 10773**

<b>CON 10772 Empath Hospice of Pasco</b>					
<b>Pasco</b>	<b>Wage Component</b>	<b>Wage Index</b>	<b>Adjusted Wage Amount</b>	<b>Unadjusted Component</b>	<b>Payment Rate</b>
<b>Base Rate Calculation</b>					
Routine Home Care 1-60 days	\$144.10	0.8791	\$126.68	\$74.23	\$200.91
Routine Home Care 61+ days	\$113.75	0.8791	\$100.00	\$58.60	\$158.60
Continuous Home Care	\$1,177.23	0.8791	\$1,034.90	\$388.23	\$1,423.13
Inpatient Respite	\$309.70	0.8791	\$272.26	\$198.01	\$470.27
General Inpatient	\$727.27	0.8791	\$639.34	\$418.04	\$1,057.38
<b>Year Two Comparison</b>	<b>Inflation Factor Year Two</b>	<b>Inflation Adjusted Payment Rate</b>	<b>Schedule 7 Revenue Year 2</b>	<b>Continuous Service Hours Provided</b>	<b>Calculated Patient Days</b>
Routine Home Care 1-60 days	1.106	\$222.19	\$3,150,483		14,179
Routine Home Care 61+ days	1.106	\$175.40	\$1,492,185		8,507
Continuous Home Care	1.106	\$1,573.91	\$418,160	24	266
Inpatient Respite	1.106	\$520.09	\$61,454		118
General Inpatient	1.106	\$1,169.41	\$552,706		473
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,674,988</b>		<b>23,543</b>
			Days from Schedule 7		24,120
			<b>Difference</b>		<b>577</b>
			<b>Percentage Difference</b>		<b>2.39%</b>

As such, the applicant’s projected patient days are 2.39 percent or 577 days more than the number of patient days calculated by staff. Revenues appear to be understated, which is a conservative assumption. Operating profits from this project are expected to increase from a net loss of \$736,330 in year one to a net profit of \$326,145 in year two.

**Conclusion:**

This project appears to be financially feasible.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)**

**CON Action Numbers: 10772 & 10773**

<b>CON 10773 Vitas Healthcare Corporation of Florida</b>					
<b>Pasco</b>					
<b>Base Rate Calculation</b>	<b>Wage Component</b>	<b>Wage Index</b>	<b>Adjusted Wage Amount</b>	<b>Unadjusted Component</b>	<b>Payment Rate</b>
Routine Home Care 1-60 days	\$144.10	0.8791	\$126.68	\$74.23	\$200.91
Routine Home Care 61+ days	\$113.75	0.8791	\$100.00	\$58.60	\$158.60
Continuous Home Care	\$1,177.23	0.8791	\$1,034.90	\$388.23	\$1,423.13
Inpatient Respite	\$309.70	0.8791	\$272.26	\$198.01	\$470.27
General Inpatient	\$727.27	0.8791	\$639.34	\$418.04	\$1,057.38
<b>Year Two Comparison</b>	<b>Inflation Factor Year Two</b>	<b>Inflation Adjusted Payment Rate</b>	<b>Schedule 7 Revenue Year 2</b>	<b>Continuous Service Hours Provided</b>	<b>Calculated Patient Days</b>
Routine Home Care 1-60 days	1.106	\$222.19	\$2,521,007		11,346
Routine Home Care 61+ days	1.106	\$175.40	\$5,299,057		30,211
Continuous Home Care	1.106	\$1,573.91	\$641,687	24	408
Inpatient Respite	1.106	\$520.09	\$81,495		157
General Inpatient	1.106	\$1,169.41	\$1,840,654		1,574
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$10,383,900</b>		<b>43,695</b>
			Days from Schedule 7		44,616
			<b>Difference</b>		<b>921</b>
			<b>Percentage Difference</b>		<b>2.06%</b>

As such, the applicant’s projected patient days are 2.06 percent or 921 days more than the number of patient days calculated by staff. Revenues appear to be understated, which is a conservative assumption. Operating profits from this project are expected to increase from a net loss of \$1,176,680 in year one to a net profit of \$601,003 in year two.

**Conclusion:**

This project appears to be financially feasible.

- e. Will the proposed project foster competition to promote quality and cost-effectiveness? ss. 408.035(7), Florida Statutes.**

**Applies to both applicants:** Strictly, from a financial perspective, the type of price-based competition that would result in increased efficiencies, service, and quality is limited in health care in general and in hospice specifically. Cost-effectiveness through competition is typically achieved via a combination of competitive pricing that forces more efficient cost to remain profitable and offering higher quality and additional services to attract patients from competitors. Since Medicare and Medicaid are the primary payers in hospice, price-based

competition is almost non-existent. With the revenue stream essentially fixed on a per patient basis, the available margin to increase quality and offer additional services is limited.

Strictly, from a financial perspective, the projects will have a material impact on price-based competition. However, the competition of a new provider should improve the SAs quality and cost-effectiveness.

- f. Are the proposed costs and methods of construction reasonable? Do they comply with statutory and rule requirements? ss. 408.035 (8), Florida Statutes; Ch. 59A-4, Florida Administrative Code.**

The projects do not involve construction costs and methods.

- g. Does the applicant have a history of providing health services to Medicaid patients and the medically indigent? Does the applicant propose to provide health services to Medicaid patients and the medically indigent? ss. 408.035(9), Florida Statutes.**

Hospice programs are required by federal and state law to provide hospice patients with inpatient care when needed (42 Code of Federal Regulations 418.108). Hospice care also must be provided regardless of ability to pay and regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation, diagnosis, payer source or financial status.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** provides its admissions by payor during CY 2023 and January 2024 history of providing services to patients with a variety of resources, primarily government programs. The applicant's Schedule 7A projects 4.0 percent of the project's year one and year two patient days.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** states that it "has a long history of providing services to Medicaid patients and proposes to provide services to Medicaid patients in SA 5A". The applicant states that "in CY 2023, VITAS provided approximately \$10 million in charity care to unfunded Florida patients".

VITAS discusses its provision of care to Medicaid and charity care patients in SAs 1, 4A and 2A comparing its projections with the actual results, which exceeded its projections. Schedule 7A indicates that 3.1

percent of years one and two total annual patient days will be provided to Medicaid/Medicaid patients, respectively. Charity care is projected to be 1.2 percent of year one and 1.0 percent of year two's total annual patient days.

**F. SUMMARY**

The applicants propose to establish a new SA 5A hospice program.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)**, is an existing Florida hospice provider licensed in SA 6A. Empath Health (its parent) affiliates also operate licensed hospice programs in SAs 3B, 5B, 6B, 6C, 8A and 8D.

Total project cost is \$799,670. Suncoast expects issuance of license and initiation of service during October 2024.

Pursuant to project approval, Suncoast offers a total of 16 Schedule C conditions.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** is an existing for-profit Florida hospice provider that is a wholly owned subsidiary of VITAS Healthcare Corporation headquartered in Miami, Florida. VITAS Healthcare Corporation is a wholly owned indirect subsidiary of CHEMED Corporation, a publicly traded company. VITAS provides hospice services in SAs 1, 2A, 2B (effective April 17, 2024), 3A, 3C, 3E, 4A, 4B, 6B, 7A, 7B, 7C, 8B, 8C, 8D, 9B, 9C, 10 and 11.

Total project cost is \$1,366,639. VITAS expects issuance of license September 1, 2024, and initiation of service October 1, 2024.

Pursuant to project approval, VITAS offers 19 Schedule C conditions.

**Need/Access:**

The projects are in response to the fixed need pool for a new SA 5A hospice.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** states it will target the 65 and older population with a non-cancer diagnosis, implement special programs, address the racial and ethnic disparities, and increase outreach.

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Suncoast contends that SA 5A need is supported by the Agency's Fixed Need Pool and the following:

- The large and growing population in the area
- The aging population in the area
- Increasing numbers of deaths of Pasco residents and higher than average death rates for certain causes of death compared to the state
- The high percentage of Pasco County resident outmigration to other Florida providers outside of the county
- The low discharge rate directly to hospice from certain Pasco acute care hospitals to hospice programs for Medicare enrollees to who die within six months of discharge from a hospital in Pasco County
- The large percentage of Medicare enrollees who die within six months of discharge from certain hospitals in Pasco County but never access hospice services.

The applicant provides detailed population data, health care assessments and its own survey data in support of its need analysis.

Suncoast Hospice projects that it will have 224 year one and 402 year two admissions.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** identifies the following specific SA populations with unmet hospice needs:

- Patients diagnosed with non-cancer, chronic, and terminal illnesses such as cardiac and pulmonary disease, sepsis, and Alzheimer's
- Patients in need of palliative care services such as palliative chemo, blood transfusions, pain pumps, mechanical ventilators, and other treatments that the existing hospices fail to provide
- Minority residents, the LGBTQ+ community, and Jewish residents
- Patients needing continuous care and high acuity/complex service offerings
- Veterans

The applicant provides detailed population data and health care assessments in support of its need analysis.

VITAS projects 371 admissions in year one and 575 admissions in year two.

**Quality of Care:**

**Both** applicants offered detailed descriptions of the ability to provide quality care.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)**

- Empath Health’s “Willing to Recommend This Hospice” CHAPS score was 86 percent which is higher than the states’ 82 percent average. Suncoast’s HIS - Patients who got an assessment of all 7 HIS quality measures was 98.8 which is higher than the state average of 96.8 percent.
- Empath Health affiliated Florida hospice programs had one substantiated complaint citing Resident/Patient/Client Rights and one Administration/Personnel categories for the three-year period ending April 23, 2024.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)**

- VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida’s “Willing to Recommend This Hospice” CHAPS score was 76 percent which is lower than the state at 82 percent. Suncoast’s HIS - Patients who got an assessment of all 7 HIS quality measures was 95.9 which is lower than the state average of 96.8 percent
- VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida hospice programs had a total of 12 substantiated complaints with multiple categories cited for the three-year period ending April 23, 2024. However, since its May 18, 2023 CHAP accreditation, VITAS has only one substantiated complaint with two categories cited—Quality of Care/Treatment and Administration/Personnel.

**Financial Feasibility/Availability of Funds:**

- Both applicants appear capable of funding the project and all capital projects.
- Both applicants appear to be financially feasible.
- The co-batched projects, strictly, from a financial perspective, will not have a material impact on price-based competition. However, the addition of a new provider should increase competition.

**Medicaid/Indigent/Charity Care:**

Hospice programs are required by federal and state law to provide hospice patients with inpatient care when needed (42 Code of Federal Regulations 418.108). Hospice care also must be provided regardless of ability to pay and regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation, diagnosis, payer source or financial status.

**Both applicants** provide their history and state they will serve Medicaid and medically indigent patients.

**Suncoast Hospice of Hillsborough, LLC d/b/a Empath Hospice of Pasco (CON application #10772)** projects on its Schedule 7A notes that “self-pay would consist primarily of charity care and uncompensated care, is projected at 1.0 percent of patient days”. Medicaid is projected to be 4.0 percent of year one and year two total annual patient days.

**VITAS Healthcare Corporation of Florida (CON application #10773)** projects on its Schedule 7A that 3.12 percent of years one and two total annual patient days will be provided to Medicaid/Medicaid HMO patients, respectively. Charity care is projected to be 1.2 percent of year one and 1.0 percent of year two’s total annual patient days.

**G. RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve CON #10773 to establish a new hospice program in Service Area 5A, Pasco County. The total project cost is \$799,670.

**CONDITIONS:**

**Special Programs:**

**VITAS Cardiac Care Program**

The age-adjusted death rate from heart disease is the leading cause of death for residents of Pasco County. Additionally, at least two hospitals in Service Area 5A have a hospice utilization rate for cardiac patients that is less than the statewide average. At least four Service Area 5A hospitals have a hospice average length of stay that is shorter than the statewide average. These statistics are indicators of late

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referrals and a need for education. These metrics can be improved by targeted, diagnosis-specific outreach to area practitioners, improved care for cardiac patients, and community education through the VITAS Cardiac Care program.

VITAS makes it a condition of this application to provide this program to hospice patients in Service 5A. The program will include the following elements:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, social workers, and chaplains will complete the training modules in the VITAS Cardiac Program Resource Manual (or its successor) within three months of their start date. Compliance with this condition will be shown by a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.
- **Provider Input:** VITAS will publicize and offer semi-annual meetings open to area cardiologists and their support staff, for the first three years of operation. These meetings will be a forum to discuss VITAS' cardiac program and obtain feedback from physicians and other clinicians on how VITAS can address their patients' needs. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the meetings were offered.
- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer semi-annual cardiac-related continuing education to area healthcare providers, for the first three years of operation. The education will focus on end-of-life care for patients with cardiac diagnoses. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.
- **Community Education:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" events open to the public for the first three years of operation. These events will be a forum for area residents to ask hospice physicians and/or other VITAS clinicians about hospice care, cardiac disease, caregiving, and

support for individuals with cardiac disease. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.

- **American Heart Association Certification:** VITAS will obtain certification within two years of the start of operations in Service Area 5A from the American Heart Association's Palliative/Hospice Heart Failure Program. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager as part of the first two annual CON condition compliance reports.

### **VITAS Pulmonary Care Program**

At least four hospitals in Service Area 5A utilized hospice for respiratory patients at a rate less than the statewide average, and at least two hospitals had shorter average length of stays than the statewide average. These metrics can be indicators of late referrals and a need for patient and staff education. VITAS proposes to improve these metrics in Service Area 5A with targeted, diagnosis-specific outreach to area practitioners, improved care for pulmonary patients, and community education through its Pulmonary Care program.

The Pulmonary Care program is described in detail in Schedule B and has three primary goals: 1) improving end-of-life care for patients with pulmonary diagnoses; 2) increasing area healthcare providers' awareness of hospice care for patients with respiratory diagnoses, and 3) increasing area residents' awareness of hospice care for patients with respiratory diagnoses. The program will include the following elements:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, physicians, social workers, and chaplains will complete training regarding care for patients with pulmonary diagnoses and their families within the first three months of their start date. Training will include at least three elements: 1) Education on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease; 2) Education on End-Stage Pulmonary Disease, and 3) Training on removal from mechanical ventilation. Compliance with this condition will be shown in a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.

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- **Provider Input:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual meetings open to area pulmonologists, their support staff, and other physician stakeholders, for the first three years of operation. These meetings will be a forum to discuss VITAS' Pulmonary Care program and obtain feedback from physicians and other clinicians on patients' needs and how the program can best address them. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the meetings were offered.
- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer COPD-related continuing education to area healthcare providers, for the first three years of operation. The education will focus on end-of-life and palliative care. VITAS will offer two programs to area providers for at least the first three years of operation. The two programs will be "Palliative Care for End-Stage COPD Patients" and "COPD: The Disease." As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.
- **Community Education:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" events open to the public, for at least the first three years of operation. These events will be a forum for area residents to ask a hospice physician and other VITAS clinicians about hospice care, end-stage pulmonary disease, and caregiving and support for individuals with respiratory disease. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.
- **Respiratory Therapist:** VITAS will include a respiratory therapist in its staffing plan for Service Area 5A. The respiratory therapist will provide patient care and serve as an educational resource to other hospice staff. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing the name and start date of the respiratory therapist in the annual CON condition compliance report.

### **VITAS Diabetes Care Program**

The diabetes death rate in Pasco County is higher than in the state's, 3.48 percent versus 3.16 percent, respectively. As many as 11.7 percent of adults in Pasco County have been diagnosed with diabetes. VITAS proposes to improve these metrics in Service Area 5A with targeted, diagnosis-specific outreach to area practitioners, improved care for diabetes patients, and community education through its Diabetes Care program.

The Diabetes Care program is described in detail in Schedule B and has three primary goals: 1) improving end-of-life care for patients with diabetes; 2) increasing area healthcare providers' awareness of hospice care for patients with diabetes, and 3) increasing area residents' awareness of hospice care for patients with diabetes. The program will include the following:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, physicians, social workers, and chaplains will complete training regarding care for patients with diabetes diagnoses and their families within the first three months of their start date. Compliance with this condition will be shown by a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.
- **Provider Input:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual meetings open to area physicians and their support staff for at least the first three years of operation. These meetings will be a forum to discuss VITAS' Diabetes Care program and obtain feedback from physicians and other clinicians on patients' needs and how the program can best address them. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the meetings were offered.
- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer diabetes continuing education to area healthcare providers, for at least the first three years of operation. The education will focus on control of Hyperglycemia and its symptoms, evaluation and treatment of diabetes complications, assessment of conditions in

which diabetes treatment approach may have a significant impact and avoiding hypoglycemia. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.

- **Community Education:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" events open to the public, for at least the first three years of operation. These events will be a forum for area residents to ask a hospice physician and other VITAS clinicians about hospice care, end-stage diabetes, and caregiving and support for individuals with diabetes. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.

### **VITAS Sepsis Care Program**

VITAS' Sepsis and Post-Sepsis Syndrome Program will benefit Service Area 5A. Four hospitals in Pasco County had lower utilization of hospice for sepsis patients than the statewide average. Four hospitals in Pasco County had shorter average lengths of stay than the statewide average, and two hospitals had higher readmission rates than the statewide average.

The Sepsis Care program is described in detail in Schedule B and has three primary goals: 1) improving end-of-life care for patients with sepsis diagnoses; 2) increasing area healthcare providers' awareness of hospice care for patients with sepsis diagnoses, and 3) increasing area residents' awareness of hospice care for patients with sepsis diagnoses. The program will include the following elements:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, physicians, social workers, and chaplains will complete training modules in the VITAS Sepsis Program Resource Manual within three months of their start date. Compliance with this condition will be shown by a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.
- **Provider Input:** For at least the first three years of operation, VITAS will publicize and host meetings with hospital staff and physicians to serve as a forum to discuss VITAS' sepsis program and obtain feedback from physicians and other clinicians on

how VITAS can address their patients' needs. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the meetings were offered.

- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer an annual sepsis-related continuing education to area healthcare providers for at least the first three years of operation. The education will focus on end-of-life care for patients with sepsis diagnoses. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.
- **Community Education:** VITAS will publicize and offer annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" events open to the public) for at least the first three years of operation. These events will be a forum for area residents to ask a hospice physician and other VITAS clinicians about hospice care, sepsis, and caregiving and support for individuals with sepsis diagnoses. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.

### **VITAS Alzheimer's and Dementia Care Program**

In Pasco County, in 2022, the percentage of Probable Alzheimer's Cases in residents age 65 years and older was 11.3, compared to the statewide average of 11.4 percent. As a chronic and incurable disease, patients with Alzheimer's and dementia represent a fast-growing group of hospice patients. VITAS is committed to bringing the latest innovations to end-of-life care to patients and their caregivers. VITAS' approach to caring for patients with Alzheimer's and dementia is threefold: 1) reducing inappropriate psychotropic use and enhance other nonpharmacological interventions; 2) educating hospice staff, caregivers, and area healthcare providers; and 3) conducting ongoing research on hospice care for these patients.

VITAS conditions this application on implementing its Alzheimer's and Dementia Care Program that will include the following elements:

- **Staff Training:** All nurses, physicians, social workers, and chaplains will complete training modules in the VITAS Alzheimer's and Dementia Care program within three months of

their start date. VITAS' Alzheimer's and Dementia Care program includes 2.5 hours of CEOs covering evidenced-based protocols for behavioral symptoms. Compliance with this condition will be shown by a log of employees' start dates and dates of training completion. The log will come with an attestation statement from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.

- **Healthcare Provider Education:** VITAS will offer annual Alzheimer's and dementia disease-related continuing education to area healthcare providers, for at least the first three years of operation. The education will focus on end-of-life care for patients with Alzheimer's and dementia diagnoses. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that continuing education was offered.
- **Music Therapy:** It has been shown that Alzheimer's and dementia patients benefit from music therapy. VITAS conditions this application on providing music therapy to these patients. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation statement from the General Manager that music therapy was offered.
- **VIP Program:** Research demonstrates that Alzheimer's and dementia patients benefit from individualized care plans. The VIP Program leverages a brief informational interview with the primary caregiver to understand the patient's likes and dislikes to develop a whole-person-centered care plan. VITAS will offer its VIP Program for these patients. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that this program was offered.

### **Palliative Care Resources**

VITAS offers all of its patients options for palliative care, as its care is a vital component of high-quality, comprehensive hospice care. The palliative care services offered by VITAS are described in detail in Schedule B. It is important to note that not all patients who could benefit from palliative care are eligible for hospice care. In order to determine what services are appropriate for patients seeking hospice care, it is important to have a detailed, open discussion with the patient and his or her family concerning end-of-life goals and

advanced care planning. To ensure Service Area 5A patients who would benefit from palliative care receive the services they need, VITAS conditions this application on:

- **Engaging area residents with serious illness in advance care planning and goals of care conversations:** VITAS conditions this application on providing easy-to-understand documents and aides to facilitate patient decisions on care for serious illness. Additionally, VITAS will use the Five Wishes document and a wishes and values guide during advance care planning and goals of care conversations. For the first three years of operation, compliance with this condition will be documented by an attestation statement from the General Manager
- **Providing Palliative Services to Hospice Patients with Cancer:** Some cancer patients can only access hospice services if the hospice can provide or arrange for treatments that are more palliative in nature, including such treatment as chemotherapy and radiation to manage pain. Not all hospice programs provide such services even if medically necessary. VITAS will provide palliative chemotherapy, radiation, and pain pumps to manage patients' pain and symptoms, as appropriate. Compliance with this condition will be documented by attestation from the General manager that these services were offered and/or provided to patients in the service area.

#### **Community Outreach Programs for Hispanic Population**

In Service Area 5A, the Hispanic population has increased yearly since 2018. In 2022, the Hispanic population made up 18.1% of the total population and 9.9% of the age 65 plus population. Despite these statistics, the hospice use rate for Hispanic patients is only 2.0%, low in comparison to the Hispanic population in the county, indicating that this is an underserved group. To increase access to hospice care for the Hispanic population in Pasco County, VITAS will implement the following:

**Spanish Speaking VITAS Representative:** VITAS conditions this application on providing a VITAS representative to Service Area 5A who is fluent in Spanish. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the annual conditions compliance report.

**Community Support:** VITAS will donate \$50,000 to the Hispanic Services Council (or a similar organization that provides outreach to this community) within the first two years of operations. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing AHCA with copies of the checks and the name of the grantee as part of the first two annual condition compliance reports.

- VITAS will coordinate with the grantee's Community Health Worker to facilitate outreach to the community and provide hospice education for the first three years of operation. VITAS will also provide hospice-related educational materials, in Spanish, to the community, for at least the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.
- Bridging the Gap Training/Discussion/Toolkit: VITAS has created a Bridging the Gap training and panel discussion for healthcare professionals and spiritual leaders on the needs of the Hispanic community (and other minority communities) at the end of life and how to engage families in end-of-life discussions. The Bridging the Gap Toolkit will also be offered to spiritual leaders to review evidence about preferences on end-of-life care and provide resources for end-of-life conversations, including how to address a patient's faith and how to engage a terminally ill patient's family to provide support. VITAS conditions this application on offering the Bridging the Gap program in the service area for the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.

### **Community Outreach for Access of Care for Hospice**

The US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) designated Pasco County as a Health Professional Shortage Area. A Health Professional Shortage Area may refer to geographic areas, populations, or facilities where there is a shortage. Often, the healthcare providers in health professional shortage areas are overworked and have fewer resources to care for patients. The residents living in these areas often have a much lower socioeconomic status and face financial barriers to healthcare. To help Pasco County residents, VITAS conditions this application on the following:

- **VITAS Mobile Hospice Education Vehicle:** VITAS will provide a Mobile Hospice Education Vehicle for outreach to the community and to offer end-of-life education, for at least the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation by the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.
- **Community Support:** To further improve access to healthcare to residents with limited resources, VITAS conditions this application on providing grants in the amounts of \$75,000 to the Good Samaritan Health Clinic of Pasco County (or similar organization) and \$75,000 to St. Andre Free Clinic in Dade City (or similar organization), within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation by the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.
- **Support for Nursing Programs:** To help alleviate the health professional shortage in the area, VITAS conditions this application on providing support to Pasco-Hernando State College's nursing program (or similar educational institution). Within the first two years of operation, VITAS will donate \$75,000 to its nursing program and will offer its nursing students community-based clinical experiences (that are neither invasive or complex). Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual condition compliance reports.

### **Community Outreach for Bereavement Services**

Through its communication with Pasco County healthcare providers, community leaders, and residents, VITAS learned that there is a lack of bereavement support after the loss of a loved one in hospice. VITAS conditions this application on providing a Community Healthcare Worker to help facilitate grief support for the community and will offer support groups and caregiver support groups available to the public. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.

### **Veterans Program**

Veterans have unique end-of-life care needs and benefit from specialized programming and care. There is a significant veteran

population in Service Area 5A. To meet the needs of this special population, VITAS will ensure programming and recognition for veterans at the end of life.

- **Honor Flight Network:** VITAS conditions this application on offering the virtual reality, "flightless" Honor Flight Visits Program to veterans who cannot participate in the Honor Flight Network trips to Washington D.C. This program is described in detail in Schedule B. For the first three years of operation, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager.
- **Veterans Walls:** VITAS also conditions this application on offering to install a Veterans Wall in at least two area assisted living facilities or nursing homes within the first two years of operation. The walls will showcase a VITAS-provided photo plaque for each veteran resident, engraved with the individual's name and branch of service. The wall serves as a resource for the community and a location for veteran-specific events. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager, in the first two annual condition compliance reports, that VITAS offered to sponsor and create the walls.
- **We Honor Veterans:** VITAS conditions this application on the Service Area 5A program entering the We Honor Veteran program and achieving Level 4 commitment to the program within the first three years of operation. VITAS regularly participates in the We Honor Veterans Program, which is described in detail in Schedule B. Compliance will be documented in the first three annual CON condition compliance reports, by attestation from the General Manager, of the program's We Honor Veterans Level and the date the program achieves Level 4 status.
- **Veteran Representative:** VITAS will provide a veteran representative to the Service Area 5A program to assist its veteran hospice patients and their families. The representative will develop solutions that meet the unique needs of veteran hospice patients and as an educational resource to the community and other hospice staff. Compliance with this condition will be documented by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual condition compliance reports.

- **Veterans Benefits Assistance Program:** VITAS conditions this application on offering its Veterans Assistance Program to assist veteran hospice patients and their families. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports that this program was offered.
- **ELNEC Training:** For the first two years of operation, VITAS conditions this application on providing the ELNEC End-of-Life Education Training-For Veterans Project to its nurses in order to better educate them on how to provide palliative care to veterans. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first two annual condition compliance reports.
- **Grant to Qualified Agency:** To further support the veteran population in Service Area 5A, VITAS conditions this application on providing support in the amount of \$20,000 to Veterans Last Patrol (or a similar organization that provides support to the veteran community in the service area) within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by providing copies of the checks and the name of the grantee as part of the first two annual compliance reports.

### **Solo Agers Outreach Program**

As previously mentioned, as of 2022, over 130,000 people in Pasco County are aged 65 and older. Of that population, it is estimated that over 26.2% of them live alone. A "solo ager" is defined as an elderly person who lacks caregiver support, either because they either live alone or their primary caregiver is unable to properly care for them. To serve the elderly population in Service Area 5A, particularly the elderly that lack caregiver support, VITAS conditions the following:

- **Solo Agers Outreach Program:** VITAS conditions this application on implementing its Solo Agers Outreach Program within the first two years of operation. This program will allow solo agers on service with VITAS to age in place safely with the knowledge that their needs will be met with compassion and kindness. To reach this goal, VITAS will provide a Community Healthcare Worker to assist its solo ager patients by identifying community services that will meet their needs. The Community

Healthcare Worker will also collaborate with local qualified agencies to provide care for this group. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.

- **Grants to Qualified Agencies:** VITAS conditions this application on providing support in the amount of \$65,000 to Pasco County Senior Services, specifically the Home Care for Elderly Program (or similar organization). VITAS also conditions this application on providing support in the amount of \$50,000 to Feeding Pasco's Elderly (or similar organization) to support home-delivered meals. Compliance with these conditions will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.

### **Outreach Programs for Pasco County Residents Experiencing Homelessness, Poverty, and Food Insecurity**

VITAS is committed to caring for all patients, regardless of their socioeconomic status or where they call home. VITAS is also committed to providing resources that will improve quality of life for all residents of the service area. VITAS conditions this application on providing a Community Healthcare Worker to provide outreach and hospice education to impoverished and homeless individuals in the service area. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager.

- **Community Support:** VITAS conditions this application on providing assistance to homeless and impoverished communities in Service Area 5A. Specifically, VITAS conditions this application on providing financial support to the following organizations, within the first two years of operation:
  - Metropolitan Ministries: A grant of up to \$60,000 to Metropolitan Ministries, earmarked for MiraclePlace Pasco (or similar organization that assists impoverished and homeless individuals). Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.
  - VITAS will collaborate with this organization to provide educational materials about hospice care (including, but not limited to, its HELLO program), for the first three years

of operation. Compliance with this condition will be provided by an attestation from the General Manager, in the first three annual condition compliance reports.

- Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County: A grant of up to \$50,000 to the Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County (or similar organization) to assist homeless individuals in the service area. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.
  
- VITAS will collaborate with this organization to provide educational materials about hospice care (including, but not limited to, its HELLO program), for at least the first three years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be provided by an attestation from the General Manager, in the first three annual condition compliance reports.
  
- Feeding Tampa Bay: A grant of up to \$50,000 to Feeding Tampa Bay (or similar organization), earmarked for Pasco County, to provide assistance to the food-insecure individuals in the service area. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.

### **Outreach Programs for Pasco County Seniors and Caregivers**

In its communication with Pasco County Senior Services, VITAS learned that there is a need for support for Pasco County's senior citizens and caregivers. VITAS conditions this application on providing a Community Healthcare Worker to collaborate with Pasco County Senior Services to provide outreach and educational resources to caregivers and senior citizens, for the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual conditions compliance reports.

- **Pasco County Senior Services:** VITAS will further support Pasco County's Senior Services (or other similar organization) mission to assist caregivers by donating \$60,000, within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be

documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.

- **Seniors in Service:** VITAS conditions this application on providing funding and/or crafting supplies, totaling \$20,000 and earmarked for Pasco County, to Seniors in Service (or similar organization), to support volunteer opportunities for seniors at the Pasco County Senior Services Center, within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be documented by providing copies of the checks and the names of the grantees as part of the first three annual condition compliance reports.

### **Provider Education and Training Programs**

VITAS has met with several healthcare providers in the service area who indicate that there is a need for additional end-of-life care training for physicians, nurses, and social workers. Hospice education programs provide healthcare providers with vital information and tools to help appropriately identify patients that would qualify for and benefit from hospice care, thereby improving access to hospice care.

- VITAS conditions this application on offering its innovative Goals of Care Preceptorship and Certification Program within the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual compliance reports.
- VITAS will offer an End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC) training program for nurses for the first two years of operation. VITAS will also offer an Education in Palliative and End-of-Life Care (EPEC) training program for physicians for the first two years of operation. Compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual compliance reports.
- VITAS conditions this application on hosting annual "Ask the Doctor and/or Clinician" educational events, for the first three years of operation. These events are open to the public and are for residents to ask a hospice physician or other VITAS clinician about hospice care, caregiving, and support for individuals who

require hospice care. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by attestation from the General Manager that the events were offered.

- VITAS conditions this application on offering educational webinars, for at the first three years of operation, to representatives of Medicaid Managed Care programs, related to hospice eligibility. As part of the first three annual conditions compliance reports, compliance with this condition will be supported by an attestation from the General Manager that the education was offered.

### **Quality and Patient Satisfaction**

On May 18, 2023, VITAS' Florida hospice programs became CHAP accredited. Full accreditation for all VITAS programs nationwide is expected to occur by September 30, 2024. In order to provide high-quality patient care, VITAS is continuously reviewing its performance to evaluate what is working and to identify ways to improve. High-quality hospice providers must incorporate care and support services that not only alleviate painful symptoms of patients but also ease the major physical, spiritual, and emotional burdens of patients and their families during such a difficult time.

- Accreditation: VITAS conditions this application on adding this program for Community Health Accreditation Partner (CHAP) Accreditation. This condition will be supported by providing an attestation from the General Manager that it has earned CHAP accreditation within two years of operation.

### **VITAS Staff Training and Qualification**

Dedicated, experienced, and empathetic hospice staff are an important component to providing high-quality hospice care to patients and their families. VITAS is committed to ensuring all of its staff, including staff in Service Area 5A, are well-trained to provide the best possible care. Accordingly, VITAS conditions this application on:

- The Medical Director covering Service Area 5A will be Board-Certified in Hospice and Palliative Care medicine or obtain certification through the Hospice Medical Director Certification Board.

## **CON Action Numbers: 10772 & 10773**

- VITAS will provide a salary increase and will reimburse any testing fees for RNs, LPNs, home health aides, and social workers who obtain certification in Hospice and Palliative Care.

Compliance with this condition will be shown by attestation from the General Manager in the annual CON condition compliance report.

### **Other Conditions:**

#### **Hospice Office Locations**

The hospice office locations are important because they can facilitate hospice visibility, community awareness, and focused interaction with the community. VITAS is committed to increasing hospice awareness and utilization in Service Area 5A.

VITAS conditions this application on having two hospice offices in Service Area 5A within the first two years of operation. Compliance will be demonstrated by submission of the VITAS license with the office locations in the first three annual condition compliance reports.

#### **Services Beyond the Traditional Hospice Benefit:**

Although the following services are provided by VITAS as a standard part of its care to patients, these services are not typically provided as they are not part of the traditional hospice benefit. VITAS conditions this application on providing these services to its patients, supported by an attestation from the General Manager in the first three annual CON condition compliance reports.

- Providing admissions in the evenings and weekends
- Telecare Program
- Providing services to address medically complex, high-acuity services
- Free prognostication tool through VITAS App
- Comprehensive Pharmacy Program
- Paw Pals Therapy
- Hair Care Volunteers Lavender Touch
- Musical Memories
- Memory Bears
- Comprehensive Bereavement Services beyond one year
- Life Bio
- Free Prognostication Tool for area physicians
- Massage Therapy

**CON Action Numbers: 10772 & 10773**

- Specialty Children's Bereavement Services
- Commitment to providing medically appropriate therapies such as physical and occupational therapies

**VITAS Will Not Solicit Donations**

The primary purpose of this project is to improve patient access to hospice care, not financial benefit. Thus, VITAS will not solicit charitable contributions from patients, family, or friends relating to its services in Service Area 5A nor will VITAS engage in fundraising events for its program. Any unsolicited donations received will be given to VITAS Community Connections, a non-profit organization that uses funds to provide donations and grants to local organizations and families, ensuring that all money goes back into the local community. Compliance will be provided in the annual CON condition compliance report with an attestation from the General Manager confirming any unsolicited amounts were provided to VITAS Community Connections.

Deny CON #10772.

**AUTHORIZATION FOR AGENCY ACTION**

Authorized representatives of the Agency for Health Care Administration adopted the recommendation contained herein and released the State Agency Action Report.

DATE: June 21, 2024



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James B. McLemore  
**Operations and Management Consultant Manager**  
**Certificate of Need**



Certificate of Need  
2727 Mahan Drive  
Building 2  
Tallahassee, FL 32308  
Ph: 850-412-4401