

## Executive Summary

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ballad Health is in its seventh full year of operation under active supervision by the State of Tennessee and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), covering the period from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025 (the Reporting Period), was marked by resilience, innovation, and a deepened commitment to improving health outcomes across Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.

Throughout this Reporting Period, Ballad Health continued to deliver the benefits prescribed in the statute, including maintaining and expanding access to essential care and services, delivering high quality care, and reducing the cost of care for the people we are entrusted to serve. This executive summary provides an overview of Ballad Health's performance during the Reporting Period. The annual report specifically addresses reporting requirements of the Terms of Certification (TOC) of the Tennessee Certificate of Public Advantage (COPA) and the Virginia Cooperative Agreement (CA).

Over the past seven years, Ballad Health has made significant strides in regional healthcare. The organization successfully reopened a previously closed hospital in Southwest Virginia, invested capital in critical infrastructure, expanded services where needed, and consolidated others where appropriate. We met the challenges of a global pandemic that claimed thousands of lives in our region and severely disrupted hospital operations. We coordinated care in the wake of Hurricane Helene and its devastating aftermath and worked closely with both the Tennessee Department of Health and Virginia Department of Health to respond to the evolving needs of the region. Notable examples include investments in mental health services, the opening of high-quality childcare centers, the creation of the Quillen Center for Urological Services, and the launch of a new dental clinic that has served thousands of uninsured Virginians.

Ballad Health has achieved these milestones while navigating national challenges, often responding faster and more effectively than other well-regarded hospitals and health systems. Current Google patient reviews reflect this performance, often surpassing those of institutions such as UVA, Carilion, University of Tennessee, Vanderbilt, Duke, and even Cleveland Clinic. Similarly, our emergency department performance outpaces those same hospitals on publicly reported metrics. Furthermore, a recent independent evaluation of physician access revealed that, while the rest of the nation has experienced a decline in physician supply, Ballad Health's rural region has either maintained or improved access in many specialties. This success is attributed to the organization's scale and ability to strategically target

needed specialties and populations. While national team member engagement scores in health care have declined in recent years, Ballad Health's scores have improved in a material way. This improvement may help explain why our nursing turnover is now at its lowest in history at 12.6%, below the national averages. These objective data points, taken individually are impressive. Together, they demonstrate a clear and measurable advantage for the communities we serve, particularly when evaluated against the benefits enumerated in law.

### **FY25 RURAL HEALTHCARE LANDSCAPE**

During FY25, the healthcare industry continued to endure a range of challenges against the backdrop of a highly inflationary economy, which had a disproportionate effect on rural health systems like Ballad Health. New federal legislation signed on July 4, 2025, includes future funding cuts that are expected to further strain rural providers. These challenges include:

- **Disproportionate impact due to social determinant issues:** Rural communities tend to experience higher rates of chronic illness and poverty. Additionally, the population in rural communities are shifting older in terms of the age cohorts. The combination of these factors puts pressure on a rural health system and the providers who seek to serve it. The region served by Ballad Health has not been immune to these challenges.
- **Disproportionately poor payer mix and inability of payer system to keep up with inflationary pressure:** Ballad Health's payer mix continues to be heavily reliant on Medicare, Medicaid, and uninsured populations, with only 22% of inpatients covered by commercial insurance coverage, making the region one of the more financially challenged in the nation. Medicare and Medicaid have historically reimbursed below the actual cost of care, a problem exacerbated by the rapid inflationary pressures affecting hospitals. Even if Ballad Health were to receive substantial increases in reimbursement from the commercial payers (something it is limited in its ability to do), the low volume of commercially insured patients would not generate sufficient revenue to offset the growing losses from Medicare and Medicaid. Other hospitals and health systems with stronger payer mixes than Ballad Health have reported losses, and these challenges have been widely documented.
- **Staffing Challenges:** Workforce shortages, particularly among nurses and a wide range of clinical staff, continued to be a top concern, both nationally and locally. Ballad Health took decisive action on wages and benefits last year and has maintained a strong focus on workforce development. These efforts have led to continued improvement in Ballad Health's nursing retention, reflected in a 12.6% turnover rate for FY25, compared to national averages that remain closer to 15%.

### **BALLAD HEALTH FY25 SUMMARY**

Ballad Health is committed to meeting the requirements outlined by the TOC and CA.

Progress in these areas is documented in the accompanying annual report. In addition, Ballad Health achieved several notable accomplishments, that while not required under the COPA, are direct benefits of the merger and further evidence of Ballad Health's benefit to the communities it serves.

### **At a Glance**

In FY25, Ballad Health continued to demonstrate its commitment to improving the health of the Appalachian Highlands region through investments in its people, COPA Plan spending commitments, and capital. These investments included:

- Partnering with the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement, the ETSU Research Corporation, East Tennessee State University (ETSU) College of Nursing, and StoryCollab on the Nursing Narrative Initiative. This project highlights the voices and experiences of nurses across the region, aiming to inspire future professionals and support current staff through storytelling and reflection. Additionally, investing in Ballad Health team members by launching B Excellent to strengthen our culture through continuous learning, skill-building, and team member engagement.
- More than \$65 million in new investments for rural health, behavioral health, children's health, population health, health research and graduate medical education, and health information exchange.
- Capital spend of over \$128 million, the highest level in our history. This included investments in new diagnostic and treatment technology, equipment upgrades, facility improvements, information technology, and the continued expansion of Niswonger Children's Hospital.

### **Hurricane Helene**

Hurricane Helene tragically struck on September 27, 2024, causing catastrophic flooding throughout the Appalachian Highlands. Floodwaters from Hurricane Helene permanently destroyed Unicoi County Hospital and caused significant disruption to several other facilities. At Greeneville Community Hospital, Sycamore Shoals Hospital, Johnson County Hospital and Laughlin Healthcare services had to be suspended and patients relocated due to flood-related damage and safety concerns. Thanks to Ballad Health's integrated system, coordinated emergency response, and the dedication of our team members, all patients were safely evacuated to other facilities.

In response, Ballad Health quickly established a 24/7 advanced urgent care clinic in Erwin, Tennessee, to ensure continued access to critical healthcare services for the community.

### **Building the Next Generation of Healthcare Leaders**

In 2024, Ballad Health partnered with Bloomberg Philanthropies, local schools and colleges to launch the first-of-its-kind Ballad Health Academy, designed to address the

national healthcare workforce shortage while creating new opportunities for Appalachian Highlands students. Through the innovative “school-within-a-school” model, recently highlighted in national media including the Wall Street Journal, high school students can graduate as Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), positioning them for high-paying jobs immediately after graduation while also earning college credit toward advanced degrees.

In FY25, the program’s first year, 218 students enrolled across seven schools in six districts throughout the Appalachian Highlands, exceeding the initial grant goal to enroll 125 students. With a \$15 million investment from Bloomberg Philanthropies as part of a broader \$250 million national initiative, Ballad Health serves as the rural pilot for one of only 10 projects nationwide.

Ballad Health Academy plans to expand to additional schools and career pathways, including healthcare technology and finance, creating a scalable model that is drawing national attention and helping to secure the region’s healthcare future.

### **Strengthening Rural Access Through Strategic Workforce Planning**

Ballad Health is taking a proactive approach to protecting care in rural Appalachia. To guide this effort, Ballad Health engaged PYA, a nationally recognized healthcare consulting firm, to conduct a detailed provider needs assessment. This process closely examines the supply and demand for physicians and advanced practice providers in the region and helps guide recruitment where shortages are most severe, and ensures we meet federal requirements.

Nationally, the projected shortage of primary care physicians by 2030 ranges from 27,300 to 40,300, According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and other workforce studies. This makes Ballad Health’s forward-looking strategy especially critical for rural regions.

Since 2018, Ballad Health has recruited more than 800 providers, including 100 in primary care, helping to close important gaps across the region. Between 2022 and 2025, general primary care adequacy improved from 62% to 72%, and eight of 12 specialties also showed measurable progress.

Ballad Health’s access and quality metrics now outperform many national peers. Only 1% of emergency room patients leave before being seen, compared to 6 to 8% at other emergency rooms. Discharge times are up to 100 minutes faster than leading academic medical centers and sepsis care compliance ranks among the best in the country.

These results show Ballad Health’s commitment to listening to our communities, recruiting where it matters most, and building the strong healthcare workforce the Appalachian Highlands relies on.

### **The Nurse Narratives Initiative**

The Nurse Narratives Initiative was launched in June 2024 through a partnership between Ballad Health, the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement, the ETSU Research Corporation, ETSU College of Nursing, and StoryCollab. The initiative was developed in direct response to the ongoing challenges affecting the nursing workforce, including high turnover, pandemic-related training gaps, and compassion fatigue.

Using trauma-informed digital storytelling and structured reflection, the initiative provides opportunities for nurses, faculty, and students to share their experiences, process stress, and build resilience. Its overarching goal is to embed empathy and reflective practice as core competencies in nursing education and healthcare delivery, while creating a library of authentic first-person digital stories that can enhance recruitment.

Program components include digital storytelling workshops, online reflection sessions, faculty and empathy-based curriculum development, the production of a documentary film, and the creation of asynchronous resources and discussion guides for hospital teams to use.

#### **Links to a sample of stories made in the workshops:**

[\*\*My Calling, by Mandy Rust\*\*](#) (Ballad Health nurse, Bristol Regional)

[\*\*Redefining Purpose, by Amber Arsenault\*\*](#) (ETSU faculty)

#### **Quality of Care – Recognition from Independent Organizations:**

Ballad Health hospitals achieved national recognition for quality and safety from several respected national organizations, including U.S. News & World Report, the American Medical Association, and the American Heart Association. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association designated multiple Ballad Health hospitals as “Blue Distinction Centers” in service areas such as cardiology, hip and knee replacement, and maternity care. In addition, they highlight only five hospitals in Tennessee as “Blue Distinction Centers in Quality and Value” for cardiology services, with two of the five hospitals being Ballad Health facilities.

#### **Leading Innovation in Physician Well-Being**

Ballad Health Medical Associates has earned bronze-level national recognition from the American Medical Association as a Joy in Medicine® Health System organization for taking meaningful steps to address physician burnout and promote well-being across the Appalachian Highlands. Ballad Health Medical Associates is the only organization in Tennessee to receive Joy in Medicine recognition for the 2025-2026 cycle, with only four organizations in Virginia achieving this distinction.

This recognition reflects Ballad Health’s commitment to creating a supportive and efficient work environment for physicians and advanced practice providers, an essential strategy for improving care quality and access in rural communities.

### **Cardiovascular Excellence Continues to Set National Standards**

Holston Valley Medical Center continues to lead the nation in cardiovascular care, cementing Ballad Health's reputation as a destination for exceptional cardiac treatment. For 2025, Healthgrades named Holston Valley one of America's 50 Best Hospitals for Vascular Surgery for the sixth consecutive year and ranked it No. 1 in Tennessee for vascular surgery. Holston Valley also earned the Vascular Surgery Excellence Award™ and received five-star ratings for several critical procedures, including abdominal aorta repair, carotid surgery (achieving this distinction for the 16th year in a row), and peripheral vascular bypass.

Holston Valley and Bristol Regional Medical Center earned the Platinum Performance Achievement Award from the American College of Cardiology (ACC) for excellence in heart attack care through the chest pain, MI Registry. Johnston Memorial Hospital received the Silver Performance Achievement Award, recognizing its commitment to evidence-based care and improved outcomes for patients experiencing acute myocardial infarction.

These honors reflect the dedication of Ballad Health's clinical teams to consistently deliver high-quality, guideline-driven care that improves survival rates and long-term outcomes for heart patients across the Appalachian Highlands.

### **Recognition Spanning Our Entire Health System**

#### **U.S. News & World Report 2025–2026 National and Regional Distinctions:**

- Holston Valley Medical Center named a "Best Regional Hospital" and ranked No. 9 in Tennessee, earning "high performing" distinctions in 10 different clinical areas.
- Bristol Regional Medical Center, Indian Path Community Hospital, and Johnson City Medical Center were recognized for excellence in cardiac, pulmonary, and surgical care.
- Specific clinical honors include high-performance ratings in hip fracture and hip replacement care, gynecological cancer treatment, aortic valve surgery, abdominal aortic aneurysm repair, pacemaker implantation, pneumonia care, spinal fusion, colon cancer surgery, transcatheter aortic valve replacement, and diabetes care.

#### **Patient Volume (compared to FY24)**

- Inpatient discharges increased by 0.8%.
- COVID discharges decreased to 1,884 compared to 2,585.
- Outpatient visits increased by 1.8%.
- Inpatient surgeries increased by 3.5% while outpatient surgeries decreased by 0.6%.
- Emergency Department visits decreased by 1.6% while urgent care visits decreased by 6.6%.

As previously reported, some decreases in outpatient diagnostic volume and lower acuity admissions are the result of deliberate efforts by Ballad Health, partnering with physician partners, to implement value-based care models under risk-based arrangements. In fact, in the two largest counties in Ballad Health's footprint, preventable hospital admissions have decreased by as much as 50%, leading to a significant reduction in the cost of health care and a related reduction in risk to patients.

Additionally, numerous provider-owned diagnostic and surgery centers are now operational, with physicians self-referring patients to their own centers. Ballad Health notes this self-referral pattern results in more commercially insured patients being referred to provider-owned facilities, while Ballad Health continues to provide care to uninsured and charity patients referred by those same providers. This payer mix deterioration contributes to ongoing financial challenges for rural hospitals. The above information is validated by the Tennessee Joint Annual Reports (JARs) data.

### **Charity Care Update**

Ballad Health maintained increased patient eligibility for charity care at 225% of the federal poverty guidelines (up from 200% before the merger in 2018). In FY25, Ballad Health provided over \$65 million for charity care, the highest since its formation.

Notably, the weighted average median household income in the region is approximately \$51,000 with some communities falling below that level. Ballad Health's threshold for free charity care for a family of 2.5 people is approximately \$54,000 based on 225% of the Federal Poverty Level. This positions Ballad Health as having one of the most generous charity care policies in the nation.

Ballad Health continued its efforts to reduce the number of preventable hospitalizations and emergency department visits. Ballad Health also remained committed to advancing value-based initiatives, such as the Appalachian Highlands Care Network (AHCN). The AHCN connects uninsured patients and their families with free or low-cost clinics, dental services, financial counseling, and preventative care services. The AHCN is recognized as a national model for partnership programs between a health system and local organizations, outpatient clinics and providers working together to deliver a more supportive system of care for the uninsured population.

These efforts to provide cost efficient care benefit the taxpayers, patients, and hospitals. By the end of the Reporting Period, the AHCN had enrolled over 11,100 uninsured individuals, demonstrating its growing impact across the Appalachian Highlands.

### **Progress in Target Areas**

Ballad Health achieved improvements in the target areas of expanding access to care, improving quality of care, and lowering the cost of care.

## I. Expanding Access to Care & Population Health

- a. **Access to Care Metrics:** Ballad Health achieved improvements in 18 of 25 access measures over the pre-merger baseline. Notable areas of improvement since FY24 include appropriate emergency department wait times, asthma emergency department visits, diabetes screening, and rate of SBIRT administration during emergency department visits. The virtual urgent care platform is available 24/7 and accessible via smartphone or internet, and Ballad Health is the only regional provider offering this service.
- b. **Population Health Measures:** Ballad Health exceeded its FY25 Population Health Plan Spend commitment of \$11 million with an additional \$4 million over its required spend.

## II. Improving Quality of Care, Patient Experience & Staff Experience

In response to the profound disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) reset the baseline year for its quality and performance measures to 2022. The pandemic significantly altered healthcare delivery patterns, patient volumes, and outcomes, making pre-pandemic data unrepresentative of current realities. By shifting the baseline to 2022, CMS aims to establish benchmarks that reflect a more stable post-pandemic healthcare environment, allowing for fairer comparisons and more accurate assessments of provider performance. This change acknowledges the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic and supports a more equitable framework for evaluating care quality in a transformed system. These new baselines are not reflected in the current year's reporting but will be reflected in FY26.

- a. **Quality of Care Metrics:** Ballad Health publishes its quality data in accordance with the COPA requirements on its website. The currently reported baselines are pre-COVID. Notable highlights include the following:
  - i. Ballad Health improved in 10 of the 17 target measures for FY25 using the pre-COVID baselines.
  - ii. Emergency Department throughput metrics have shown improvement. Notably, *OP22 Left Without Being Seen* decreased by 33.8% compared to FY24. The median time from ED arrival to transport for admitted patients and the ED2b ED Decision to Transport (ED1) also improved.
  - iii. Ballad Health implemented a standardized mortality case review process, supported by predictive analytic tools to help caregivers identify and act on early signs of deterioration. These efforts contributed to

measurable reductions in mortality from FY23 to FY25, across various conditions, including Heart Failure (25%), Pneumonia (18%), and Sepsis (14%).

- iv. Among the hospital infection indicators, Ballad Health is performing as expected or meeting the measure in all but one measure when using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommended adjustment methodology accounting for differences in patient population.
- b. ***Clinical Council:*** The Clinical Council (the Council) is aligned with the Ballad Health Board of Directors and the Board's Quality, Service and Safety Committee (QSSC). During FY25, the Council was comprised of 27 physicians from many backgrounds and specialties. Of those physicians, nearly half were independent. The Council continued to assist in establishing key quality and patient safety priorities with consideration to risk, volume, propensity for problems (including incidence, prevalence, and severity), impact on health outcomes, patient safety and quality across all areas of care. Key accomplishments in FY25 included:
  - i. enhancements in electronic health record workflows,
  - ii. standardization of a variety of high-value care initiatives,
  - iii. implementation of projects for provider wellbeing and workforce support,
  - iv. updates to medication use processes, and
  - v. improvements to children's and women's care standards.
- c. ***Patient Experience:*** In the aggregate, 90% of patients surveyed by Press-Ganey, the nation's most credible firm for tracking patient and employee experience, would recommend Ballad Health's hospitals. In some Ballad Health hospitals, that number reaches as high as 97%. While emergency department wait times remain a concern, it should be noted that the metrics for Ballad Health outperform national averages, and some of America's, Tennessee's, and Virginia's most well-respected health systems in areas such as patients who leave without being seen, time from presentation to discharge, and sepsis care. Ballad Health's results are as good as, or better than, Vanderbilt, the University of Tennessee, the University of Virginia, Cleveland Clinic, Carilion, and other well-respected providers. These data points are publicly reported on the hospital-compare website.
- d. ***Workforce and Career Development:*** Ballad Health has added programs and enhanced existing ones since its last report, reflecting a

significant investment in workforce development resources. These efforts are designed to equip Ballad Health team members to deliver the best experience for both patients and colleagues. Programs include B Excellent, onboarding programs for new leaders, tiered leadership development tracks, the Healthcare Advisory Program, and expanded tuition reimbursement and scholarship opportunities.

### **III. Lowering Cost of Care**

Ballad Health and community physicians continue to reduce the cost of care to patients, employers, and government payors through value-based care.

- a. **Price Transparency:** Ballad Health continued to meet the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services hospital price transparency requirements under section 2718(e) of the Public Health Service Act. As such, Ballad Health's gross charges, discounted cash prices, payer-specific negotiated rates, and de-identified minimum and maximum negotiated rates for all hospital items and services as well as a consumer-friendly estimator tool and other pricing information are publicly available on its website.
- b. **Cost-Efficiency Measures:** According to countyhealthrankings.org, Ballad Health and community physicians have reduced preventable hospitalizations in our region by 50% since 2017. This has resulted in over \$200 million of annual recurring savings to taxpayers, employers, and patients. Our region's preventable hospitalization rate is as low, or lower than, communities like Nashville – a stunning result given the magnitude of resources available in those communities. In FY25, Ballad Health saw more than \$45 million (for projects greater than \$200,000) in savings due to cost-efficiency measures taken across the areas of contract labor, supplies, and pharmacy efficiency.

Through the work of the AHCN, Ballad Health has helped reduce preventable hospitalizations for the uninsured population, reducing the cost to taxpayers of charity care, and improving patient safety by avoidance of hospitalization.

### **FY25 Partnership & Research Highlights**

Ballad Health has made significant strides in advancing academics and research in rural Appalachia through strengthened collaboration with its academic and community partners.

- Ballad Health spent a total of \$9.6 million in grant funding during FY25.
- The Ballad Health Academy enrolled 218 students and held "Signing Day" activities after just last year receiving one of only 10 grants in the U.S.

from the Bloomberg Foundation for the initiative dedicated to accelerating pathways into healthcare careers.

- Ballad Health continued its multifaceted academic partnership with the ETSU Center for Rural Health and Research, supporting joint initiatives in rural health innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Filled all slots in the match process, a testament to the progress we are making in our training programs given the challenges of recruiting residents to independent, rural residencies.
- Ballad Health also continued its research collaboration with Harvard Medical School's Department of Health Care Policy, focusing on rural hospital competition, closures, and service delivery.

In addition to academic research, Ballad Health participated in federally supported studies, including work with the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) to combat opioid use in rural communities and with the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) Accountable Health Communities Model, which addressed health-related social needs through clinical-Community partnerships. Ballad Health also funded a myriad of initiatives across a broad spectrum of research.

- Ballad Health and its partners had 132 new and ongoing clinical studies in FY25, with new studies focused on trauma, oncology, and cardiology.

#### **FY25 Health Plan Progress**

Ballad Health continued to make notable progress on its health plans:

*a. Behavioral Health Highlights:*

- Provided community access through 10,590 completed visits at integrated sites, a 37% increase over FY24
- Provided 4,014 crisis assessments and managed 35,053 calls
- Served 1,854 patients at the 24-hour Walk-in Crisis Center in Johnson City, Tennessee, providing needed care to these patients and lessening the burden on the emergency departments
- Served 6,384 patients in the Child/Adolescent Outpatient Behavioral Health clinic in Johnson City, Tennessee, a 474% increase over FY24
- Continued operation and growth of the STRONG Futures program in Greeneville, Tennessee and began work to bring the program to Virginia
- Hosted a Recovery Symposium with ETSU focusing on prevention, addiction treatment, and the recovery ecosystem

*b. Population Health Highlights:*

- Continued to develop the population health infrastructure within the community, including supporting the Unite Us Network
- Increased the number of Unite Us platform users to 283 in-network

organizations including 535 programs and 2,823 users

- Expanded the use of Healthy Planet and Compass Rose for social care integration and care management work
- Expanded its work as a Community Improvement Organization, enrolling more families in STRONG Starts, and enrolling more participants in the Appalachian Highlands Care Network (AHCN) (Reached 9,986 families enrolled in STRONG Starts and increased AHCN enrollment to 11,129 with 4,141 enrolled in complex care management)
- Supported efforts on prevention, early detection, and intervention aimed at reducing leading causes of mortality and morbidity

Although Ballad Health met its 10-year spending commitment ahead of schedule for the Rural Health Plan and Children's Health Plan, it continued to invest nearly \$20 million in these areas.

*c. Rural Health Highlights:*

- Expanded access to primary care practices through new hires
- Recruited physician specialists to address rural access needs
- Continued 24/7 Urgent Care with 18% growth
- Launched a consolidated tele-neurology platform averaging 250 consults per month
- Coordinated preventative health care services across rural communities

*d. Children's Health Highlights:*

- Opened one new Center for Early Learning development, with nine centers now serving 724 children
- Continued growth in the number and impact of Niswonger Network sites, with 39 Affiliate and Care Sites onboarded, a total of 588 education sessions provided, and 140 Community Outreach events occurring at these sites
- Maintained a pediatric complex care program with 379 active enrollees
- Hired a variety of pediatric subspecialists including radiology, anesthesia, orthopedics, surgery, neonatology, and clinical psychology

## Continuing Care after Hurricane Helene

Thanks to our integrated system, coordinated emergency response and the dedication of our team members, care never stopped.

In the days that followed, Ballad Health teams, partnering with the American Red Cross, Frontier Health, local leaders and other organizations, delivered medical, financial and behavioral health support to schools, churches, shelters and first responders. Mobile behavioral health teams provided counseling while staff – even those who had lost their homes – continued to show up for patients and volunteer in community recovery efforts. The resilience of Appalachia was on full display. Ballad Health continues to work with FEMA, TEMA, and other partners on the long-term rebuilding of Unicoi County Hospital, ensuring sustainable care for the community.



## Nurse Narratives Initiative

Nurse Narratives Initiative has convened digital storytelling workshops for **90** Ballad Health nurses, faculty, students and patients—each creating a personal, 2–4-minute story.

An additional 140 Ballad nurses have participated in 90-minute online story-sharing sessions. Community premieres drew 200 attendees (nurse stories) and 120 attendees (student & faculty stories). Within academia, over 35% of ETSU faculty have participated in a digital storytelling workshop, an empathy-based curriculum development workshop, and are now committed to implementation across the curriculum.

***"Sharing my story reminded me why I became a nurse. It gave me back my purpose and helped me connect with my colleagues in a deeper way."***

Across the Ballad footprint, and beyond, NNI is turning lived experience into learning. Nurses describe reduced isolation and renewed purpose; faculty report improved morale, and collaboration; students practice reflective and compassionate communication skills they can carry into clinicals; and patients see their experiences shaping care. What began as stories is becoming a systemwide practice for building empathy, improving communication, and supporting workforce well-being.



***"Telling my story made me pause and really reflect on why I chose this path... it reminded me of the values I want to carry with me as a nurse."***



## Awards and Recognitions

- U.S. News & World Report, the American Medical Association, and the American Heart Association have recognized Ballad Health hospitals for quality and safety. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association has designated several Ballad hospitals as "Blue Distinction Centers" in services such as cardiology, hip and knee replacement, and maternity care.
- Ballad Health Medical Associates has earned bronze-level national recognition from the American Medical Association as a Joy in Medicine® Health System organization for taking meaningful steps to address physician burnout and well-being in our region.
- Holston Valley Medical Center continues to lead the nation in cardiovascular care, cementing Ballad Health's reputation as a destination for exceptional cardiac treatment. At the same time, Johnston Memorial Hospital received the Silver Performance Achievement Award.



**Blue Distinction®**  
Center



## Innovative Cardiac Care

- Holston Valley Medical Center (HVMC) performed its first EVOQUE tricuspid valve replacement in April of 2025 - the very first in East Tennessee.
- HVMC has long been recognized for its excellence in cardiovascular care. Just one more way we're bringing the latest, minimally-invasive treatments to our community here in the Appalachian Highlands.



## Listening and Learning through Google Reviews

	Hospital Rating	Emergency Dept. Rating
Bristol Regional Medical Center	4.5	2.9
Dickenson Community Hospital	3.5	NA
Franklin Woods Community Hospital	4.0	4.1
Greeneville Community Hospital	4.0	3.8
Hancock County Hospital	4.5	NA
Hawkins County Memorial Hospital	4.2	3.9
Holston Valley Medical Center	3.8	3.6
Indian Path Community Hospital	4.2	4.2
Johnson County Community Hospital	4.1	NA
Johnson City Medical Center	3.5	3.2
Johnston Memorial Hospital	3.9	3.8
Lee County Community Hospital	4.2	NA
Lonesome Pine Hospital	4.1	4.1
Norton Community Hospital	3.8	4.0
Niswonger Children's Hospital	4.0	4.4
Russell County Hospital	4.2	4.4
Smyth County Community Hospital	4.1	4.1
Sycamore Shoals Hospital	4.2	4.0

	Hospital Rating	Emergency Dept. Rating
UVA Health University Medical Center	3.1	2.2
Carilion Clinic Memorial Hospital	2.9	2.8
University of Tennessee Medical Center	2.9	2.1
Vanderbilt University Medical Center	3.2	2.1
Duke University Hospital	3.2	1.6
Cleveland Clinic Main Campus	3.4	2.1

Google Reviews serve as a transparent, publicly accessible record of patient sentiment—unfiltered, uneditable, and influential in shaping healthcare perception.

Data as of 10.8.2025

## Behavioral Health | School-Based Services

### Goals & Objectives

- Promote Mental Wellness
- Early Identification and Intervention
- Increase Access to Services
- Improve Academic Performance
- Develop Social and Emotional Skills
- Foster Positive Relationships
- Reduce Behavioral Problems
- Support Families
- Continuity of Care



### 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

Ease your state of mind in stressful moments.



Acknowledge 5 things you can see around you.



Acknowledge 4 things you can touch around you.



Acknowledge 3 things you can hear around you.



Acknowledge 2 things you can smell around you.



Acknowledge 1 thing you can taste around you.

## REPORTING REQUIREMENTS, PROCESS & COPA COMPLIANCE

### Regulations

The laws governing the Tennessee COPA and the Virginia CA, passed by the assemblies of each state and affirmed by their respective governors, define the policy permitting active supervision of the Ballad Health merger and identify the key measures of public benefit which any supervised merger should achieve.

These policy priorities are embedded in Ballad Health's strategic and management action plans which are approved and monitored by the Ballad Health Board of Directors and leadership of Ballad Health. These policy priorities, as outlined in Tennessee and Virginia law, include:

- Enhancement of quality of hospital and hospital-related care;
- Preservation of hospital facilities in geographic proximity to the communities traditionally served by those facilities to ensure access to care;
- Demonstration of population health improvement in the region;
- Gains in the cost-efficiency and cost containment of services provided by the hospitals;
- Improvements in the utilization of hospital resources and equipment; and
- Avoidance of duplication of hospital resources.

Section 6.04 and Exhibit G of the Tennessee TOC, Virginia Code 15.2-5384.1 and Title 12 Virginia Administrative Code 5-221-110 require submission of an annual report determining continued benefit of the merger to the public.

### The Process

In compiling the information and materials for this Annual Report, the Ballad Health COPA Compliance Office identified the departments responsible for gathering and preparing these materials. Leaders of the departments (Responsible Parties) were identified and given responsibility to submit the required materials and information. The COPA Compliance Office requested each of the Responsible Parties to certify, to their knowledge and belief after due inquiry, that Ballad Health was in compliance with the TOC and CA for their areas of responsibility for the Reporting Period and that any materials they provided for inclusion in this report were complete.

### COPA Reporting Requirements

The COPA Compliance Office reporting requirements are part of the COPA Annual Report and were certified by Ballad Health's COPA Compliance Officer. This report covers topics such as the COPA Compliance Complaints Report, activities of the COPA Compliance Office, a forecast of expenses and a work plan.

Notable compliance related items from this year's COPA Compliance Office Annual Report include:

- Ballad Health maintains a systemwide Code of Ethics, which requires

mandatory compliance by all team members, including compliance with the section referencing the TOC and the CA. All team members are provided annual training, are required to report any non-compliance, and are provided the means and mechanism by which to do so, including anonymously.

- No COPA Complaints were filed with the COPA Compliance Office during the Reporting Period.
- FY 25 Plan Spend is not yet finalized, but Ballad Health believes it met spend and baseline commitments for all Plans. Ballad Health remains in a cumulative underspend position for the Behavioral Health Plan, though progress was made during the year.
- On October 2, 2024, Ballad Health provided notification under Article 1 of the TOC and Condition 17 of the CA of a force majeure resulting in a material adverse event due to the unimaginable destruction and disruption from Hurricane Helene. As a result, both the TDH and the VDH granted a 30-day extension for submission of the FY24 annual report and the FY25 first quarter report. On December 9, 2024, Ballad Health notified both the TDH and the VDH of its return to normal operations, except for Unicoi County Hospital in Tennessee, which was a total loss. Ballad Health continues to provide updates to both Departments regarding plans to rebuild the Unicoi County Hospital.