

NEWS

Racial justice, health causes lower priority for Brevard, East Central Florida donors

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Brevard was among a group of Florida counties that were lowest in the state for charitable donations to racial justice causes in 2021, according to research released last month by the Florida Nonprofit Alliance.

The new study, produced in partnership with the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and the Jesse Ball duPont Fund, also showed donors in East Central Florida counties gave far below the state average to health-related causes, including groups that support mental health.

The survey of more than 1,400 households across the state was conducted in January. Results were weighted by age, sex, race, education, geographic location and annual household income.

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About 17% of households in the "Central East" region — which included Brevard, Indian River, Okeechobee, St. Lucie and Volusia counties — reported giving to groups and individuals supporting racial justice, compared to 26% of Florida households elsewhere in the state, the research found.

The region was last in that category in 2021 among all eight regions defined by the study, according to Leah McDermott, program manager for the Florida Nonprofit Alliance.

"One of the areas that this particular region I think can work on is the idea of supporting racial justice," McDermott said Tuesday at a presentation of the group's research findings in Rockledge.

Health-related causes — including contributions to charitable organizations that provide mental health resources — also suffered relative to the state.

Just 2.5% of charitable donations in East Central Florida counties went to health causes last year, compared to the state average of 8.6%, according to the study.

The scarcity of donations combined with a lack of volunteers — East Central Florida came in seventh out of eight regions in volunteering for charitable causes, McDermott said — has impacted the ability to provide services to Brevard residents with mental health needs, according to Natalie Hussein, president of the nonprofit National Alliance on Mental Illness in Brevard County.

Rockledge Regional Medical Center: One of Brevard's only mental health crisis units about to close amid care shortage

"We definitely need the financial contributions," Hussein said. Even combined with other sources of funding, present donations barely covered operating costs, she added.

"Unless you live under the same roof with someone who is really struggling, I don't know that that is high on the priority list," she said.

Not all the results of the research were discouraging, said Florida Nonprofit Alliance CEO Sabeen Perwaiz.

The study — the first of its kind on a state level in the United States, Perwaiz said — showed East Central Florida residents were above the state average in giving to the arts, education and international causes.

They also came out significantly above the average in reported giving to other forms of charity not covered by the survey, which could include direct contributions to specific foundations, disaster response funds and others, McDermott said.

About 13% of East Central Florida households reported contributions in the "other" category, relative to about 7.8% statewide.

Perwaiz said the results of the survey, which was geared toward informing charities about recent giving trends, are relevant to people who seek new options when considering giving to

charity.

It also debunks a long-held myth that Florida residents, many of whom move here from out of state, are tight when it comes to donating their time and money, she said.

"Our state, despite how many people move here and we assume that they don't connect, they connect with a lot," Perwaiz said. "So Florida is actually very generous."

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