



THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL CUSTOMER JOURNEY:

# Creating a Web Experience that Helps Them Down Their Path.

No one expects to need a children's hospital — until they do. And in that moment, your website becomes a critical tool — not just for providing information, but for creating clarity, offering guidance, and making the experience a little easier during a hard time.

Whether we're talking about a bank or a children's hospital, site users go on a similar customer journey — from awareness of the problem to research and consideration of a solution. This article explores how your hospital's site can support families through every step of the customer journey.

Because every part of the experience matters — especially when care is on the line. Let's dig in!



# Awareness

## The Need for a Children's Hospital is Discovered

It could be a crucial emergency. Or, it could be a completely elective surgery. One thing's for sure — no one really *\*wants\** to go to a children's hospital. Parents and guardians in these situations are often navigating stress, urgency, and uncertainty — which makes clear communication and user pathways absolutely necessary.

### Information Architecture

We'll never know the exact situation in which a parent or guardian arrives on a children's hospital site. But we know one thing: there's a lot of information to sort through, whether it's specific to their visit or more general to a condition or procedure.

This is the work of information architecture: using plain, empathetic language in navigation labels; organizing content around parent-friendly questions rather than internal department structures; and offering clear pathways for both common tasks and more complex journeys.

Key resources — like provider directories, condition-specific content, or appointment scheduling — should be prioritized in the navigation and homepage. Guidance elements such as step-by-step help, suggested pages, or decision trees can reduce friction and reassure families that they're on the right path.

### Search

While clear content structure goes a long way in helping an anxious parent or guardian navigate your children's hospital site, some users will know exactly what they need right away — and they want to *\*search\**. But, bolstering your site search experience isn't just for superusers — those who are just learning about a condition may search using symptoms ("my child has a fever"), conditions ("juvenile arthritis"), or even vague terms ("children's bone doctor").

Because site users rely on real language rather than medical jargon, search must be able to support both to present users with the best

content — even when their questions are unclear.

Features like predictive text, auto complete, and AI-driven vector-based searching can support not only medical language, but synonyms, misspellings, and vague wording in order to connect users with the best answers.

### Accessibility & Performance

Some people will access your site from their desktop computer, backed by a hard-wired internet connection. However, just as many will be accessing it from a mobile device, sometimes from an area with unstable coverage. Because a children's hospital serves all people, all people need to be served by the children's hospital website.

Accessibility isn't a feature — it's a requirement. Content should follow WCAG 2.1 guidelines to support any temporary or permanent disability, with content written at a simple reading level — after all, parents are often seeking comfort and understanding, not clinical detail.

At the same time, performance matters. Parents may be accessing the site from a waiting room or in transit, meaning pages must load quickly and function reliably on all screen sizes and devices. A fast, accessible experience isn't just good UX — it reflects the hospital's commitment to care for all families, equally and respectfully.



### A/B Test Suggestion

Consider different "escape hatch" blocks or "best bets" on the search page, giving access to common pages without the need to interpret deeper results. If certain keywords tend to lead to more frequent action, consider boosting them in search.



# Research

## Parents and Guardians Begin Building Understanding

With a rush of information, parents and guardians turn to \*understanding.\* How do they take everything they've learned and apply it to their choice? Your site should help with this, moving from confusion to clarity by connecting users to relevant information, trusted providers, and support resources based on what they already know, and what they still need to learn.

### Facets and Filters

Parents and guardians aren't looking for just any healthcare options. They're looking for services based on what matters most to their family. Which means they need a way to help filter out options that don't quite fit.

This means a set of search results won't quite cut it. Faceted search allows site users to filter providers or services by specialty, location, availability, accepted insurance, gender, language spoken, and more. This is especially helpful for families dealing with a specific diagnosis — for example, \*a pediatric neurologist within driving distance who accepts their insurance\*.

Filters should be prominently placed, easy to adjust, and preserve context as users refine their search. When done well, this eliminates guesswork and shortens the path from research to reassurance.

### Personalized Experiences

The more a parent interacts with the site, the more helpful it should become. This is where personalization fits in.

If a parent or guardian has already searched for "pediatric cardiology," visited provider profiles of cardiologists, and read a page about congenital heart conditions, the site should begin surfacing related content: FAQs, support groups, scheduling information, and provider availability.

This doesn't require deep personalization, and instead can be driven by behavioral patterns during a session. By offering relevant next steps or suggesting resources tied to their browsing history, the experience feels more thoughtful and guided, helping parents feel seen and supported during a confusing time.

### Provider Directory

As a parent or guardian begins settling in, they'll begin focusing less on the condition and more on \*people\*.

A provider directory should offer more than just names and titles — it should help families get a feel for the care team. This includes professional bios, areas of focus, photos, and (ideally) short videos where providers introduce themselves and describe their approach to care. This is especially valuable in pediatrics, where warmth and approachability matter as much as credentials. Letting parents "meet" their providers online helps reduce anxiety and builds trust before the first appointment.



### A/B Test Suggestion

Run an A/B test to evaluate which facet filters are used most frequently, and which combinations lead to higher engagement or appointment conversions. Use the results to streamline or re-prioritize filter options.



# Consideration

## Parents and Guardians Begin Logistics & Planning

As parents begin planning for a hospital visit, their questions shift from “What’s wrong?” to “What do we do next?” The website should support this phase with practical, reassuring tools that make the process of getting to and interacting with the hospital as smooth as possible. The more clarity and confidence the site can provide here, the better the overall experience.

### Integrated Location Details

Traveling to a children’s hospital — especially one in an unfamiliar city — can be stressful. Parents need quick access to maps, directions, parking details, and nearby lodging.

Integrating location information directly into your site — while remaining compliant with HIPAA — makes the transition from research to arrival smoother. Features like embedded maps, click-to-navigate buttons, and printable directions reduce uncertainty. When paired with contextual prompts (e.g., “Plan Your Visit” or “Where to Park”), this information empowers families to focus less on logistics and more on their child’s care.

### Media Library

Hospitals generate a wealth of valuable media: video tours, provider interviews, patient stories, podcasts, and guides that help explain care and what to expect. But without a central, well-organized media library, much of this content gets buried or lost.

By grouping media into a searchable, filterable resource — categorized by audience (e.g., new patients, surgical prep), topic, or format — families can quickly find the content most relevant to their situation. Making these assets easy to view and share strengthens trust, reinforces your hospital’s expertise, and gives families helpful tools to navigate complex situations.

## HIPAA-Compliant Data Capture

As families begin to prepare for a visit, they will shift into administrative mode: submitting forms, signing up for text alerts, and even registering for overnight stays. \*It’s a lot of stuff\*.

But, more than just the weight of the paperwork, sending sensitive personal information over the internet can feel uncomfortable. Ensuring that these interactions are secure, encrypted, and HIPAA-compliant is critical — not just for legal protection, but to earn the confidence of worried parents. The site should clearly communicate security measures in plain language and provide reassurances that their family’s data is being handled with care and professionalism.



### A/B Test Suggestion

Test different types of engagement on location and visit-planning pages — such as prompting users to explore a facility map vs. linking directly to directions. Track which approach leads to better engagement and task completion.



# Action

## The Care Period Begins

Once a child is receiving care, a hospital's website becomes a daily tool for parents — used for checking records, managing appointments, and getting answers in the moment. At this stage, the site must shift from informative to actionable, offering clear, secure, and location-aware access to the tools and resources families need most during a hospital stay.

### Location-based Content

Parents accessing your site from inside the hospital are likely focused on immediate needs — checking in on test results, finding their way to a department, or paying a bill.

By using IP or location-based data, the site can adapt to surface the most relevant calls-to-action for those already on-site. This might include quick links to patient portals, cafeteria menus, parking information, or in-room services.

Timely prompts — like a reminder to complete post-visit paperwork or confirm an upcoming appointment — can turn a routine visit into a more seamless experience. The goal is to reduce friction during a stressful time.

### Hospital System Integrations

For families in active care, your hospital website should feel like the central hub for everything — from scheduling a follow-up appointment to paying a bill or accessing medical records. This requires safe, seamless integrations with internal systems like EHRs, payment gateways, and scheduling platforms.

Parents shouldn't have to navigate multiple portals to manage their child's care. Instead, a well-integrated site provides a consistent interface that respects their time and reduces confusion. The more your website can anticipate these needs and make them accessible in one place, the more trust and satisfaction it builds.

## Secure Hosting Environments

Parents might visit your site at any hour, from any location. Whether it's midnight in the NICU or a lunch break during a day-long appointment, they need a reliable and secure experience.

Hosting matters here — your site must be built on a platform that supports fast performance, near-perfect uptime, and strong data protection. Downtime or lag isn't just frustrating — it can erode trust.

Beyond performance, a secure hosting environment is essential to protect personal and medical data, especially when dealing with HIPAA-compliant services. The hospital's digital infrastructure should reflect the same level of care and security expected within its physical walls.



### A/B Test Suggestion

Test which types of in-care content best support families: practical resources like maps, menus, and billing access, or emotional content like patient stories and provider spotlights. Use those insights to balance utility and empathy.



