

## Healthy Start – Saves Lives and Money

In 2010, Florida's infant mortality rate was 6.4 per 1,000 live births, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). While this is the lowest in the Southeast, it places Florida in the middle of the pack nationally (#24) and shows us lagging far behind the top states of Alaska, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, which have rates of 4.4 or lower.

Fortunately, most newborns grow and thrive. Of those that don't, 57 percent nationally die for one of the following five reasons:

- Born with a serious birth defect.
- Born too small and too early (i.e., preterm birth; birth before 37 weeks gestation).
- Victims of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Affected by maternal complications of pregnancy.
- Victims of injuries (e.g., suffocation).

[The Florida Association of Healthy Start Coalitions](#) reports that racial disparities and premature deaths are the two biggest issues impacting Florida's infant mortality. Black babies die at a rate of 12.0 per 1,000 births, almost three times higher than whites (4.6 percent) and more than double the rate for Hispanics (5.2 percent). Prematurity is the leading cause of infant deaths in Florida, with 26,560 babies dying in 2011 because they were born too early and too small. In addition to the emotional toll this takes on parents and families, there is a huge cost to society: The average medical costs for a preterm baby are more than 10 times higher than those for a healthy full-term baby.

"Healthy Start works with local prenatal care providers and birthing facilities to screen all pregnant women and infants, identify risks for poor birth outcomes, and make referrals to Healthy Start for needed services. Healthy Start is a voluntary program, and each local program meets the unique needs in its community. Last year, 204,346 women and infants were served by Florida's Healthy Start program. As part of Healthy Start, eleven area Fetal and Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) projects conduct root cause examinations and follow a nationally recognized model for making changes in the community and improving quality of care. In addition, Healthy Start Coalitions brought in nearly \$24 million in supplementary funding and services in 2012!"

Additional funding is needed to support Healthy Start's work with mothers that help their babies have a healthy start. Florida's Healthy Start Coalitions are seeking an additional \$3.2 million from the 2013 Legislature. The money will pay to provide over 54,200 services to almost 3,000 pregnant women and infants, including 1,149 pregnant women at the most intensive risk level.

The House and Senate have recognized the tremendous value families and the state receive from a vibrant Healthy Start system. They have added an additional \$1 million to next year's Healthy Start budget, which will extend the program's reach to those who need it most. We urge them to match the \$3.2 million request that, if met, will start Florida on its way to becoming a leader in fighting infant mortality nationally, not just in the Southeast.