



Escambia County
Healthy Start
COALITION
Every baby deserves a healthy start

1201 N. Tarragona Street
Pensacola, FL 32501
O: (850) 696-2291
F: (850) 696-2551
www.healthystart.info

Remembering the Babies Left Behind **Claire Kirchharr**

Contact: research@healthystart.info (850-530-1955)

Last month, thousands of parents in our community sent their children off to their first day of kindergarten, posting pictures of smiling faces full of excitement and promise on social media. However, 28 families did not get to enjoy that moment with their child this year. In 2013, five years ago, 28 babies in Escambia County, died before their first birthday¹. That means that this year's kindergarteners will be missing nearly two full classes of friends².

September is nationally recognized as Infant Mortality Awareness Month. The month is dedicated to raising awareness about one of the country's most significant public health issues and remembering those babies who did not live to see their first birthday. Since the formation of the Escambia County Healthy Start Coalition in 1992, our community has seen a 40% decrease in the County's infant mortality rate (calculated as the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births)³. This seems like a win, and it is, but our County has so much more work to do. Escambia County's infant mortality rate is still higher than the state of Florida and that is unacceptable. We must continue to strive for better.

The progress we have realized thus far has been achieved largely due to the tireless efforts of our healthcare system, community organizations, and government bodies that provide resources and education to families in our community. But there is always room for improvement

¹ (Florida Health, 2013)

² (Florida Department of Education, 2018)

³ (Florida Health, 2017b)



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and investment in the system of care that should protect and ensure the optimal health of our most vulnerable citizens: pregnant women and infants.

Recently, a study was published by Florida Atlantic University researchers in the journal *Social Science and Medicine* that examined how public health spending impacts infant mortality in Florida. In their paper, they sought to measure how public health spending for three state health programs – Healthy Start, Improved Pregnancy Outcomes Program (IPOP), and Women Infant and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) – have impacted infant mortality rates in all 67 counties in Florida. Their research was remarkable in finding that “a ten percent increase in infant related public health spending leads to a 2.07 percent decrease in infant mortality”⁴. More powerful, black infant mortality rates fall by 4.04 percent for each 10 percent increase in programs targeted specifically⁵. The authors assure, “This relationship persists even after accounting for the differences in several demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, availability of medical resources, as well as county and year fixed effects”⁶.

For Escambia County, the funding for infant-related programming is critical. Last year, there were 30 infant (under 1 year of age)⁷ and 26 fetal (stillborn) deaths⁸. Twenty of those infant deaths

⁴ (Bernet, Gumus, & Vishwasrao, 2018)

⁵ (Bernet, Gumus, & Vishwasrao, 2018)

⁶ (Bernet, Gumus, & Vishwasrao, 2018)

⁷ (Florida Health, 2017b)

⁸ (Florida Health, 2017a)



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lived less than one month⁹. Twenty percent (1 in 5) were sleep-related deaths, and forty percent (2 in 5) were born extremely premature¹⁰. The infant mortality rate for black infants was twice as high as for white (11.5 vs 5.4)¹¹.

Any infant death is tragic, but the programs that were examined in the study are shown to prevent these numbers from being so much higher. Last year alone, Healthy Start, a home-visiting program providing education and support services to pregnant women and infants, helped 1,940 women and 916 infants and the Improved Pregnancy Outcome Program (IPOP) provided services to 487 women. The Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) currently has 9,300 women and children enrolled to receive nutritional counseling, breastfeeding support, and food assistance. These programs provide education, health care referrals, and aid families in navigating healthcare and social services available in our area, ensuring families are supported during their pregnancy and motherhood.

Unfortunately, state funding for public health in Florida is one of the lowest in the nation, almost 33% less than the national state average (2013-2014)¹². Last year, Healthy Start faced a potential 30% cut (\$19 million) in state funding that would have been devastating for programs across the state. It is vital that we protect public health funding to ensure the health of our

⁹ (Florida Health, 2017c)

¹⁰ Per the 2017 Fetal and Infant Mortality Review conducted by the Escambia County Healthy Start Coalition

¹¹ (Florida Health, 2017b)

¹² (Dadi, 2016)



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community, especially the youngest amongst us. Infant Mortality is recognized worldwide as an indicator of community health. When people live in unhealthy communities they are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors that increase their risk of losing an infant. And this goes for women across the life course. The risk of infant mortality does not start with a woman's health during pregnancy but begins during childhood. Women, regardless of age, need to be able to access health care, healthy foods, and live in a community that supports their mental and physical health. To learn more about how infant mortality affects our community and what you can do to help prevent babies from dying, join the Escambia County Healthy Start Coalition at our Remembrance Ceremony on Thursday, September 6, from 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm, at Bayview Park. The event is free to the public. To learn more, call the Coalition office at 696-2291 or follow us on Facebook at [Facebook.com/HealthyStartESC](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyStartESC).

To learn more about services for pregnant women and infants in our area, please reach out to the following programs.

Healthy Start Care Coordination Services

Service include: Home visits ,Childbirth education, Breastfeeding support, Parenting education, Family planning education, Smoking cessation support, Counseling services, Referrals for nutrition counseling, Coordination with local agencies and resources" If you are interested in working with a Healthy Start Care Coordinator, please call **850-417-3690** for program eligibility.

WIC

"The Federal Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides EBT cards for free food to use at local grocery stores as well as nutrition and breastfeeding counseling for Women, Infants and Children under 5 years old."

Call 850-595-6670.

IPO



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"IPOP helps pregnant women access prenatal care, apply for Medicaid assistance and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) nutrition program. The program provides screenings for potential problems and/or risks. IPOP also provides education to promote healthy behaviors during pregnancy." **Call 850-595-6500, Option 2**

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