

## **A call to action: An open letter to the residents of Miami-Dade County**

Black infants in Miami-Dade County are *more than twice* as likely as white infants to die in the first year of life. Florida's new Black Infant Health Practice Initiative (BIHPI) intends to raise awareness and instigate action to help reduce this disparity. Signed by Governor Charlie Crist and supported by a majority of the Florida Legislature, the legislation states that birth outcomes are "internationally recognized as measures of health for a community."

The American Association for the Advancement of Science recently summarized the evidence showing that poverty and racism, by increasing exposure to toxins and elevated levels of maternal stress hormones, cause significant neurologic damage to the developing fetus, infant and young child. Similar mechanisms either during pregnancy or throughout life have a negative effect on the health of ethnic-minority communities increasing heart disease, cancer, diabetes, depression, motor-vehicle accidents and violence.

Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has noted that infant mortality, and consequently economic growth, can be substantially improved with comparatively small investments in maternal health and education. Eradicating racial disparities in infant mortality is possible and critically important. But it will require an unflagging, widespread commitment. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. ... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

We invite our business leaders, elected officials, and other concerned members of our community to join us in Miami-Dade's Black Infant Health Practice Initiative, to create a plan and implement changes that will help reduce the unacceptable toll of illness and injury. Contact the Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade County, through [BIHPI@hscmd.org](mailto:BIHPI@hscmd.org) or visit their website [www.hscmd.org](http://www.hscmd.org) for additional information to join. Together, we can promote positive change to reduce black infant mortality and achieve a healthier community for all of us.

Signed,

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**For the Black Infant Health Practice Initiative Community Action Team**