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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MAGNOLIA PROJECT FUNDED FOR FIVE MORE YEARS TO IMPROVE BIRTH OUTCOMES IN JACKSONVILLE

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The Magnolia Project, a special initiative for women before, during and after pregnancy, received a five-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)'s *Healthy Start Initiative: Eliminating Disparities in Perinatal Health* to continue providing services in Jacksonville. Magnolia is an initiative of the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition and a longstanding service in the community that focuses on reducing disparities in infant mortality.

Infant mortality is the death of a baby before his or her first birthday, and considered a sentinel indicator of a community's health. When communities experience infant mortality, it is a reflection of the overall health and challenges of a population. Through the federal Healthy Start initiative, 100 organizations serving communities with infant mortality rates at least 1.5 times the U.S. national average, and with high rates of other negative maternal and infant outcomes, will receive up to \$1.1 million each year over five years starting April 1, 2019. The Magnolia Project was one of six programs funded in Florida, and the only one in Northeast Florida.

The Magnolia Project focuses on improving the health and well-being of women during their childbearing years (15–44 years old) by empowering communities to address medical, behavioral, and cultural and social service needs. While the Project has served only Health Zone 1 for the past 20 years, it will shift its focus to the city's zip codes with the current highest infant mortality rates: 32208, 32209 on the Northside (Magnolia West) and 32211, 32277 in Arlington (Magnolia East).

The Magnolia Project will focus on serving African American women of childbearing age, their children up to 18 months old and their spouses/partners in the four-zip code area. The new Magnolia Project area has a high infant mortality rate and particular needs around access to prenatal care, higher rates of poverty and poor economic opportunity. The area is directly impacted by health, economic and social disparities, as well as toxic stress and the effects of racism.

The expansion to the Arlington zip codes will also include new clinical services provided in the two zip codes through a partnership with Jacksonville University's Keigwin School of Nursing. Currently, there are no prenatal care providers in the area – a critical gap that will be addressed through the federal Healthy Start funding. Services will continue at Magnolia's Pearl Plaza location, which includes both women's health and primary care clinics, in addition to case management and outreach.

From 2013-2015 to 2015-2017, infant mortality for the project area increased from 11.7 deaths per 1000 live births to 13.6 deaths, while the city's overall infant mortality rate declined. The area's black infant mortality rate is even higher – and black babies are more than 2.5 times as likely to die compared to

white babies. Racial disparities are persistent and defy socioeconomic status, education, individual health behaviors and a host of other factors that typically affect health.

The Magnolia Project was implemented in 1999 to address an identified gap in the system of maternal and child health services directly linked to health disparities in infant mortality — pre- and inter-conception care. The Project is a recognized leader in the development, implementation and evaluation of preconception health and related interventions using a life course approach and serves as an important community entry point for women seeking both prenatal and well-woman care, especially family planning services. In 2010, the project adapted its interventions to address social determinants and reproductive health capacity at the community-level, in addition to individual health and social risk factors.

About the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition

The Healthy Start Coalition leads the community effort to reduce infant death and improve the health of children, childbearing women, fathers and their families in Northeast Florida. For more information, [view our media kit](#) visit us at <http://nefhealthystart.org> or on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram @nefhealthystart.

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