



NEWS RELEASE
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**MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE FOR THE BLIND RECEIVES FLORIDA BLUE FOUNDATION
GRANT TO PROVIDE EYE CARE SERVICES FOR SENIORS**

Grant supports services for over 3,000 seniors in vulnerable neighborhoods

Miami, Florida, – Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired announced it is the recipient of the Florida Blue Foundation's 2019 Innovation in Health Care System grant. The four-year, \$400,000 grant, which commences in January, will provide low vision programs to seniors (55+) in vulnerable, low-income neighborhoods in **Miami**.

"There is a tremendous need for eye health care services for seniors. By the age of 75, one in four people are impacted by some form of low vision. We have seen a rapid growth in our program participants from 387 adults in 2004 to over 3,500 in 2018, the majority of which are seniors in our low vision programs; our clients who are legally blind are provided services through funding from the Division of Blind Services," says Virginia A. Jacko, president and CEO, Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired. "Miami Lighthouse wants to close the gap for seniors in these vulnerable neighborhoods and eliminate barriers by increasing access and knowledge of services."

Miami Lighthouse will offer an all-inclusive approach to the program consisting of strategic community outreach, educational activities and direct services to increase access to professional eye health care. The program provides direct low vision care to seniors in vulnerable neighborhoods and will deliver accessible eye care (functional vision assessments, adaptive aids and dilated eye exams), fall prevention and coping strategies related to vision loss experienced by some of the most vulnerable residents in Allapattah, Brownsville, Liberty City and Overtown.

Vision loss is associated with diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetes, cardiovascular issues and often causes depression but it is also a result of aging. Jacko herself was left totally blind after being diagnosed with an eye disease 20 years ago. Studies show that individuals in underserved and minority communities who are part of the aging population, and who have a visual disability, face a trifecta of risks given the lack of general knowledge of eye health and services available. These factors create barriers to vision care and rehabilitation.

Miami Lighthouse will offer presentations in each community and use different tools (such as questionnaires and vision screening exams) designed to identify eye health needs. The Miami

Lighthouse mobile eye care unit will be deployed, and transportation will be provided to ensure all those in need receive these critical services.

Over the next four years Miami Lighthouse will make around 144 presentations at senior centers and in collaboration with community organizations, potentially impacting 3,200 low-income minority seniors. This outreach includes training with occupational therapists to increase independence, coping strategies and quality of life.

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired has been Florida's premier rehabilitation organization serving the blind. Through education, training, research and vision enhancement Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired provides hope, confidence, and independence to people of all ages.

Florida Blue Foundation enables healthy communities by making grants, building coalitions and rewarding best practices. More than three million people in Florida have received direct health services as a result of grants made to nonprofit organizations since its founding in 2001. Florida Blue Foundation is a trade name of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Foundation, Inc., an Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more information about the Foundation, please visit www.floridabluefoundation.com.

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FLORIDA BLUE FOUNDATION
CONTACT: Toni Woods
PHONE: 904-905-3153
EMAIL: Toni.Woods@floridablue.com

MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE FOR THE BLIND
CONTACT: Cameron Sisser
PHONE: 786-362-7515
EMAIL: CSisser@miamilighthouse.org