

# Addressing Maternal and Child Health at the New Orleans Health Department

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Anna Qamarudeen [newcomb@tulane.edu](mailto:newcomb@tulane.edu)

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This semester, I had the opportunity to work as a reproductive justice intern at the New Orleans Health Department (NOHD). My knowledge surrounding maternal and child health has increased significantly since the beginning of the semester. My supervisor, Meshawn A Siddiq, Deputy Director of NOHD, provided me with the empowering experience of exploring maternal and child health in the New Orleans community. Louisiana's maternal mortality rate exceeds the national average (39

deaths per 100,000 live births compared to the national average of 32.2 deaths per 100,000 live births); therefore, I was very interested to learn the reasons for this large disparity. I also developed a newfound awareness about the services and resources New Orleans offers families in need of additional support.

I spent the majority of my time this semester completing two literature review papers. The first literature review I wrote focused on the implementation of baby boxes in different parts of the world. Baby boxes were originally created by [Finland in the 1930s](#) to address the country's high infant mortality rate. A baby box is essentially a durable cardboard box including a mattress, baby clothing, a bottle, a baby thermometer, and other necessary supplies to aid an infant's first year of life. The box is constructed in a way where it can be used as a crib or a bassinet. The resource has been effective in delivering the message of safe sleep practices to families by educating them on the importance of laying babies on their backs when they sleep. The Finnish baby box has inspired many other countries to design their own form of newborn supply kit to grant all children an equal start in life.

The second literature review I wrote concentrated on researching U.S. state programs and interventions to increase breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), many babies are not continuing to breastfeed or exclusively breastfeed for as long as recommended. I discovered some of the barriers to breastfeeding and what states can do to promote breastfeeding, such as enacting the World Health Organization Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative recommendation.

I am excited to continue my work and further enhance my knowledge of maternal and child health with the New Orleans Health Department next semester as I become more involved in researching the impact of baby boxes on the New Orleans community. I am very grateful to both the Newcomb Institute and the New Orleans Health Department for this experience to learn more about the field of maternal and child health.