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*M.P.H. Candidate, Global Health Track*

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**Practicum Site:** Tennessee Department of Health

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## ***Informing Tennessee's Maternal Health Strategic Plan***



**Introduction:** The Maternal Health Innovation program (MHI), funded by HRSA, is nested under the Family Health and Wellness Department at the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH). The MHI program is tasked to develop Tennessee's first maternal strategic health plan over a five-year period and implement state-specific actions to address maternal health and improve maternal health outcomes in Tennessee. To inform the maternal health strategic plan, we conducted and facilitated community listening sessions (CLS) to gather feedback from community members on the state of maternal health in Tennessee.

**Methods:** Community listening sessions (n=11) were conducted involving 65 participants between July 2023 and August 2023. Through partner organizations representing East, Middle, and West Tennessee, stakeholders such as community members, doulas, birth support persons, birthing parents, physicians, nurses, midwives, and anyone who has cared for a pregnant person were invited to participate in the CLS. Data was analyzed using the inductive thematic analysis method.

**Results:** Thematic areas that emerged unveiled vital themes related to maternal care access and quality of care, including the need for education, improved provider care, language support, and transportation access. Transportation barriers were notably identified as a significant social determinant of health. Strategies for improvement encompass community and provider education and training, community engagement, advocacy for doula services, integrated and coordinated healthcare services, and a review of the TennCare reimbursement policy.

**Conclusions:** Community engagement, particularly through CLS, has proven invaluable in shaping effective strategies for policy review. This practicum has provided a valuable opportunity to gain experience in community engagement, communication, and qualitative data analysis. Next steps include conducting a community needs assessment to further address maternal health challenges.