

READING 7.1: HMHC & THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Healthy Mothers, Healthy Children coalition has welcomed your organization into the network, and expressed excitement that you are willing to undertake some budget monitoring research to strengthen the campaign in Sunrise State. The secretariat of the Coalition has asked you to investigate what is happening in the health service delivery process to cause such a high maternal mortality rate in the city of Mortalia.

To inform your budget monitoring of the Sunrise State health department and its implementation of maternal health care in Mortalia, you have met with a number of role-players with an interest in the health sector and asked them what they think is causing the high incidence of maternal mortality. Your aim has been to gain a broad sense of the obstacles and weaknesses in maternal health service delivery. So far you have found out the following.

First, you met with a senior researcher at Sunrise State University, who works in the Health Systems Research Unit (HSRU). This academic organization has undertaken some in-depth research of the problems experienced at three primary health clinics and two secondary hospitals, and conducted interviews with various medical experts in the field. The senior researcher summarized their findings like this:



There simply aren't enough skilled birth attendants on duty at primary health clinics to provide maternal health services. Our research shows that even those nurses who are present are not necessarily qualified in obstetric care.

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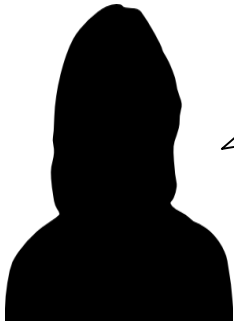
Next, you met with a Member of the Sunrise State Legislature, a veteran MP and one of the stalwarts of the women's movement in Polarus. She is a member of the APSP Opposition Party, as well as the Legislature's Portfolio Committee on Health, and has been known to take a special interest in maternal care and child health. She gave you the following perspective:



The problem is clear, my friends. With the rapid urbanization Mortalia has experienced, we now have a drastic shortage of clinics in the city. The governing party has promised to build more health facilities, but as always they have let us down. They should explain this to the women of Sunrise State!

You also managed to set up a meeting with a journalist who works for the **Polarus Times**, who has a reputation for investigative reporting on health issues. He agreed to introduce you to one of his sources, an ex-employee in the state primary health system in Sunrise State. She was willing to share her experiences with you, on condition of anonymity, and told you this:

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It's the ambulance services: they hardly ever came when we needed them. Also, many of the drivers were charging private fees for transporting patients. I saw families paying bribes to get a wife or daughter from the clinic to a hospital in an emergency. They are a law unto themselves, those ambulance drivers.

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Which of these explanations is true? Who is right about the main service delivery problems undermining maternal health in Mortalia?

Remember there could be more than one set of factors contributing to the poor implementation of maternal health care in Sunrise State.

However, in order to advance your budget advocacy, you need specific and accurate information to back up any claims you make about the problem and desired solution to improve maternal health.