

## **An Equal Start to Life: The Finnish Baby Box and Maternal-Infant Wellbeing in the United States**

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A commentary based on the findings of the Department of Global and Public Health at Tampere University, Finland and 2020 Kela Publication: “The baby box Enhancing the wellbeing of babies and mothers around the world”

Finland has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world and has consistently ranked in the top percentile in maternal health, maternal and paternal equality, and childhood education. Many Americans cite Finland’s small, homogenous population (5.5 mil<sup>1</sup>, 338,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and remote, Nordic location as barriers to practically translating Finnish maternal-infant health tactics abroad, especially to the United States (330.8 mil<sup>3</sup>, 9.8 million km<sup>2</sup>). Finland’s success has nevertheless drawn the attention of international public health officials, particularly regarding their rapid ascent to maternal-infant health, including the dramatic decrease in infant mortality rates from the 1950’s, amidst war, famine, and disease outbreaks (52/1000 live born) to one of the lowest in the world in 2018 (1.6/1000 live born) in less than 70 years. The Social Insurance Institute of Finland (Kela) recently released a report on the international impact of the Finnish “Baby Box,” an innovative form of maternal-infant social support, which has been implemented in over 63 countries<sup>5</sup>, including the US. Understanding why the Finnish Baby Box has been so popularly adapted, as well as its implications in larger, heterogeneous, non-Nordic countries, may hold the key to valuable lessons in maternal-infant health and wellbeing, especially where mothers and babies are particularly at risk. US infant mortality rates, especially in African American babies, have decreased much less dramatically than in Finland and remain among the highest rates within high-income countries. Finnish maternal-infant health concepts may yet hold the key to the future health of millions of Americans, especially those discriminated against or in other vulnerable positions. This brief overview expands on our findings in the Kela report by specifically addressing the foundational concepts of the Finnish Baby Box, such as “equal start to life” and the complex social support system it represents, as well as various vulnerable positions in the US, such as pregnant people in a pandemic, undocumented migrant labor, or in prison, that might potentially be well-supported by a similar “baby box” concept.