

HEALTH CARE

Audit shows Health Department improves maternal mortality monitoring amid rising rates

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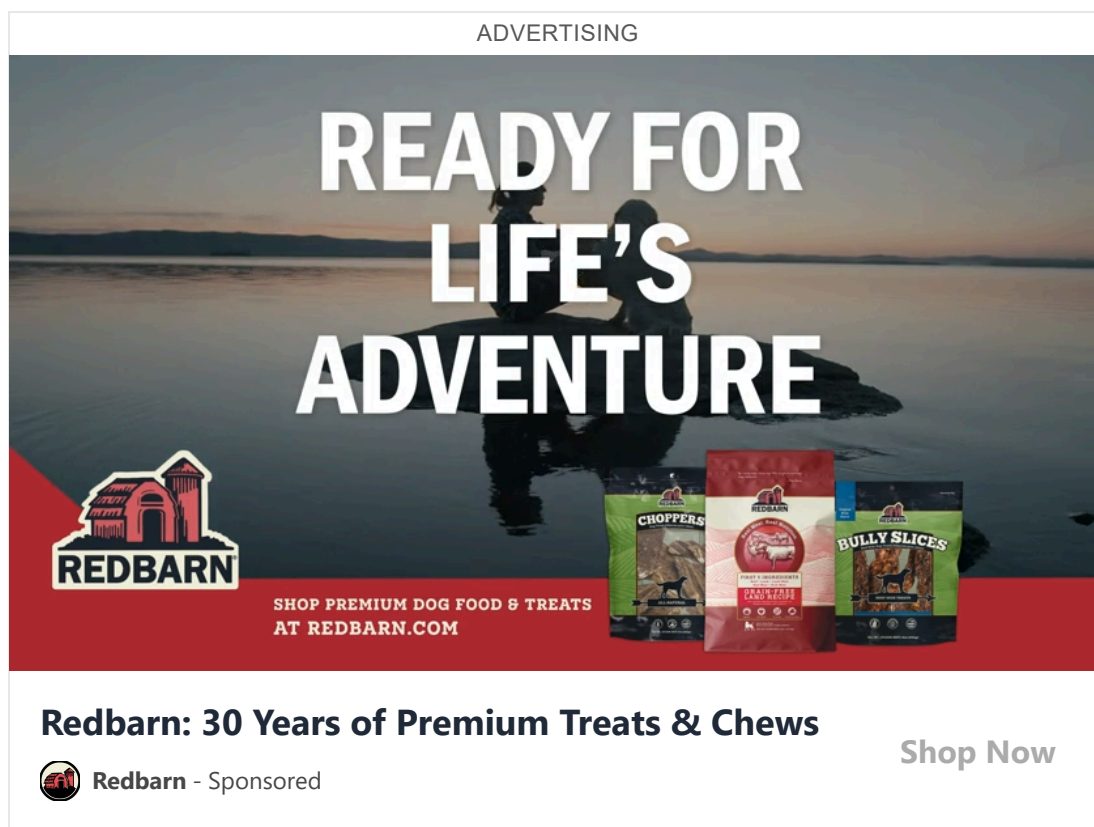
By **Ethan Geringer-Sameth**

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The state Department of Health has made progress evaluating measures aimed at reducing maternal deaths after an audit found the agency failed to monitor its own mitigation efforts, according to a new report from state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli.

The Health Department has been examining programs aimed at reducing pregnancy-related deaths in the two years since a 2024 audit, also from DiNapoli, found major gaps in its analysis of the work as deaths and racial disparities worsened, according to the follow-up report issued Thursday.

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The 2024 audit evaluated maternal death rates in the years after the state established a task force to make recommendations for reducing mortality and entrenched racial inequities in perinatal care. The state, led by the Health Department, largely implemented the task force's recommendations but had not taken steps to track all of them or collect data on serious pregnancy-related illnesses, according to the 2024 audit. During that time New York's maternal mortality rate and disparities for Black mothers grew, driven by public health disruptions during the pandemic and persistently high C-section rates.

Between 2018 and 2022, New York's 22.4 deaths per 100,000 births placed it 17th in the nation, with Black women dying at over three times the rate of white women, according to the comptroller's report.

Since then, the Health Department has dedicated additional resources to hospital discharge records and other data to identify and better understand severe maternal

morbidities, which includes acute or chronic illness related to pregnancy, DiNapoli's office said. It has also implemented new programs with assessment criteria, including a pilot virtual home visiting service. The department has at least 14 partnership programs with birthing hospitals, according to the report.

The report did not evaluate the efficacy of the new efforts.

"These efforts are part of a broader, ongoing commitment to ensure that all programs are evidence-based, outcomes-driven, and responsive to the needs of communities most affected by disparities," said Health Department spokeswoman Danielle DeSouza. "The Department remains focused on continuous improvement and transparency as we work to improve maternal health outcomes and reduce inequities for all New Yorkers."



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