

Tulane researchers analyze design thinking in global health

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newwave@tulane.edu



Alessandra Bazzano, pictured, social entrepreneurship professor at the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking and faculty member at the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, co-authored a report in the PLOS journal with Taylor Center colleagues Laura Murphy and Maille Faughnan. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

When a GE designer learned pediatric patients were often frightened by MRI scans, he transformed the experience into an adventure. With a touch of imagination, paint and special effects, the machines morphed into submarines or spaceships ready to transport patients to an alternate world.

This story is one of many involving the growing trend of using design thinking, a human-centered approach, to develop innovations in health. A [Tulane University study](#), published in the *Public Library of Science* journal, is the first comprehensive review of this movement, analyzing human-centered design outcomes in the field.

“We took an evidence based approach to understanding the use of design thinking in health,” said Alessandra Bazzano, social entrepreneurship professor at the [Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking](#) and faculty member at the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. “So far, there has not been this kind of reflection on how it is being used in light of how popular the trend is.”

Bazzano co-authored the report with Taylor Center colleagues Laura Murphy and Maille Faughnan. The findings will help decode why and how design thinking can be valuable in health-related research.

When analyzing relevant literature, the team of researchers identified a need for more documentation of methods and evaluation in design thinking projects to integrate the information into the larger global public health field. They also found the lack of standard definitions for design thinking and human-centered design further complicated reporting across disciplines.

Bazzano hopes future efforts will address these challenges to build a foundation of results for the use of human-centered design in health. “We would like to see design thinking for global health not be just a trend, but a part of long-term change. This review aims to raise that profile.”