

## Taking a public health approach to public safety

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In the fight against urban violence, if information is power, one Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine professor is doing his part to give local law enforcement and other community organizations a boost.



“The strategic command is important because it brings the data to the table so people can make informed decisions based on evidence rather than gut feeling,” says David Seal, a professor in the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

David Seal is a social psychologist teaching in the [Department of Global Community Health and Behavioral Sciences](#) who currently serves as director of research for the Mayor's Strategic Command to Reduce Murders.

Before coming to Tulane, Seal was involved in a similar program in Milwaukee that made a marked improvement in that city's murder rate. The Mayor's Strategic Command to Reduce Murders is a part of Mayor Mitch Landrieu's NOLA for Life plan to stem the homicide rate in New Orleans.

“The Strategic Command is modeled after the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission, which was started in 2005 and has become a national model for examining multiple sources of police and law enforcement data and trying to identify

trends in real time,” says [Seal](#).

He says that the strategic command helps law enforcement and community providers by getting multiple organizations communicating in ways they may not have before and identifying gaps in the useful information they receive. This information is used to develop innovative strategies aimed at murder reduction. The key to the success, Seal says, is doing all of this quickly enough to address patterns of crime.

“If we see something that's emerging in January, we don't want to wait until the next January or February and say 'look at this trend from last year,'" Seal says. “We want to capture it in real time and strategically take action to stop it before it becomes a year-long trend.”

While Seal has only been in New Orleans for a little over a year, he says he's “honored” to have a chance to make a positive impact on the city so soon after arriving.

“Anytime you can help people have a better quality of life ? to create safer environments ? that's a very rewarding thing to be a part of,” Seal says. “Ultimately public health is about improving the quality of life for communities, and I think this is a wonderful opportunity.”