



## ARIANA ÁVILA, MPH

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### Lessons from Haiti in Global Health Diplomacy

As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, **Ariana Ávila, MPH**, was acutely aware of the agricultural workforce consisting of immigrant and black and brown communities while growing up in rural southwest Florida. While Florida is often viewed primarily as a beach vacation state, Ariana knows that Florida is a far more complex place- it is an agricultural hub in the deep south, supported by immigrant labor. This workforce includes people from Haiti- a country where Ariana spent 2.5 years as a PHI/CDC Global Health Fellow for [CDC Haiti](#).

a focus in nutrition. Graduating with an MPH, Ariana moved to Atlanta and worked with a private monitoring and evaluation firm, conducting an assessment with the DeKalb County Board of Health. On this team, Ariana evaluated two programs supported by the Board of Health: a mobile farmer's market to assess access to fresh fruits and vegetables and the use of community spaces for physical activity.

#### BECOMING A FELLOW:

Global health built on Ariana's interest in cross-cultural relations and working with international populations, and Ariana saw the fellowship as a great opportunity to work with a US agency with a global health focus. As a Fellow for CDC Haiti, she joined the Cooperative Agreement (CoAg) team to collaborate with the office's PEPFAR implementing partners. Having previously lived abroad and greatly enjoying the experience, the appeal of living outside the U.S. was also a draw to the program. The fellowship built on her international work experience and provided valuable learning opportunities through collaborating with governmental organizations and local NGOs, while learning more about the history and culture of Haiti.

#### LIFE IN HAITI:

Ariana's arrival in Haiti was marked by another arrival- Hurricane Matthew, which devastated the southern part of the country. This experience allowed her to see emergency response in action as she learned how the U.S. government and the Haitian government collaborated to assist those in need. As a Fellow, she coordinated and led a high-level visit from Dr. Tedd V. Ellerbrock, the HIV Care and Treatment Branch Chief of CDC's Division of Global HIV & TB. Ariana's many field site visits in country and throughout the capital city of Port-au-Prince were huge learning opportunities, where she was involved with implementing **"a diverse set of PEPFAR-funded activities focused on HIV prevention, testing and counseling services, the provision of**



A global citizen, Ariana has worked in Atlanta, New Orleans, Haiti, and Ecuador. After graduating with a Bachelor's in Biomedical Science in 2011 from the University of South Florida at Tampa, Ariana worked for a law firm for two years before pursuing her Master's in Public Health at Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. At Tulane, Ariana focused on global health and working with the Latinx population in New Orleans. In school, Ariana jumped at the opportunity to travel to Cuba to learn about their healthcare system, along with conducting research in Argentina on Chagas disease, and working in Ecuador for 3 months with

**treatment, and support to laboratory and health information systems.”** Ultimately, this reinforced her interest in anthropology, health programming and her post-fellowship career trajectory.

Most notably, the kindness of her colleagues allowed Ariana to embrace the office culture of CDC Haiti, where colleagues truly felt like family- greeting each other each day, asking about their families and even sharing avocados from their gardens. For Ariana, **“leadership at CDC Haiti was truly incredible”** and she felt “very lucky to be placed with such a wonderful team” who she still keeps in touch with and continues to admire for their strength, drive and dedication.



*Ariana with colleagues in Haiti*

Along with relationships built, a highlight of her fellowship was learning about global health diplomacy and health communications. As a Fellow, Ariana learned about the history of Haiti, the role of colonization in the country and the history with the neighboring Dominican Republic. She left Haiti speaking French and Haitian Creole and took advantage of a two-week French immersion course in Tours, France, where she connected with a CDC headquarters team member. Ariana also attended a GIS training with a few other Fellows in Amsterdam which was also an “great experience” and combined a training at the National Institute of Public Health in Mexico City with an opportunity to visit family from Mexico.

## WORKING FOR CDC HEADQUARTERS IN ATLANTA:

After 2.5 years in Haiti, Ariana finished out the remain-

der of her year at CDC Headquarters in Atlanta due to civil unrest, which required evacuation of all non-essential personnel. While it was challenging to leave the country and colleagues she had come to love, she took advantage of the opportunity to learn from CDC staff at headquarters and network. Although her time with the Health Systems and Human Resources Team (HSHRT) was short, Ariana joined “another incredible team working towards meeting CDC and PEPFAR goals.” She is “grateful to the CDC Haiti office and the PHI team” for coordinating a smooth transition in an uncertain time. Upon returning to the U.S., Ariana decided to return to her interests in U.S. domestic health and policy, particularly migration and health.

## PURSuing A PHD IN MEDICAL AND BIO-CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY:

A current PhD student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ariana specializes in Medical and Bio-Cultural Anthropology. In looking ahead, Ariana is interested in applying intersectionality theory when considering the embodiment of race, ethnicity, and U.S. immigration status, and how U.S. immigration policies cause stress and impact biological outcomes on the epigenome, particularly among immigrants of color in rural Florida. Most importantly, Ariana hopes to closely collaborate with a community in doing this participatory-based research by meeting with community leaders and gathering data on what the most pressing health issues are.

## ADVICE FOR FUTURE FELLOWS:

Ariana notes that “one of the most important lessons that I learned was to be adaptable and be flexible” not just in context of living abroad, but also when it comes to programming. Every year with PEPFAR, she learned how to respond to changing requirements that her office needed to meet. She looks back at her fellowship fondly:

**“I’m forever grateful for my experience in Haiti and my colleagues that became friends...not just from the CDC office but from other agencies in the US embassy that I was able to work with, as well as individuals that I met throughout my time in Haiti.”**

*-Whitney Hall, Administration & Communications Specialist*