

memo

DATE: February 2, 2022
TO: WIC Coordinators and Local Agency Staff
FROM: Carole Kelnhofer, WIC Training Coordinator
SUBJECT: Doula Care- Topic of the Month

Written within Minnesota Statute [181.939 Nursing Mothers, Lactating Employees, and Pregnancy Accommodations](#), the law states that “An employer must provide reasonable accommodations to an employee for health conditions related to pregnancy or childbirth upon request, *with the advice of a licensed healthcare provider or certified doula*”.

Many of you may wonder what role a doula plays in providing care for our pregnant and postpartum participants. This memo will focus on a doula’s roles in supporting families and their scope of practice when providing care.

What is a doula?

A doula is a trained individual that provides individualized physical and emotional support as well as evidence-based information and advocacy to the parent before, during, and after childbirth. The doula does not provide medical care. They do offer evidence-based information to support the informed decision-making process.

How can a doula help?

The purpose of doula support is to empower the parent to achieve a healthy and rewarding birthing experience. Doula care has been shown to greatly improve birth outcomes for both the parent and baby. In the State of Minnesota, doula support has led to a 22% decrease in premature births for pregnancies covered by Medicaid.¹ Doula-assisted births have also shown to be four times less likely to result in a low birth weight (LBW) baby.²

A doula may help to educate and support breast/chestfeeding. Studies have shown that access to culturally appropriate doula care resulted in a “near universal” 97.9% breast/chestfeeding initiation rate.³ The same study found that disparities in maternal health are diminished with access to the culturally specific individualized care that a doula may provide.

Support also includes the birth partner, which can extend to a positive impact on the entire family. Read on for some of the key benefits provided by accessing doula services.

Key Benefits of Doula Care

- **Lower the need for a medication-assisted birth**
- **Reduce the risk of a cesarean delivery**
- **Shorten time spent in labor**
- **Decrease the risk of premature birth**

- **Increase breast/chestfeeding initiation**
- **Improve overall birth outcomes**
- **Eliminate racial and class disparities in perinatal health**

Are there different types of doulas?

Most people have heard of a Birth (Antenatal) Doula; however, there are Postpartum Doulas available as well. The availability of either type of doula may vary in each specific area. A doula certification is not required to practice. However, to be eligible for the state registry and reimbursement for services through Medicaid, certification is required by the State of Minnesota. Check out the state registry page below for more information on certifying organizations and a list of registered doulas.

Registered Doula's in the State of Minnesota: [Minnesota Doula Registry](#)

What is a doula's scope of practice?

The State of Minnesota does not have a set list of standards or competencies required of a doula to be eligible for the registry list. Each certified doula must follow [Standards and Ethics](#) agreed to by their certifying organization, similar to those provided here by DONA International. The standards and ethics typically include established rules of conduct and ethical responsibilities to the client, colleagues, and to the profession.

In general, the scope of practice is to provide physical, emotional, and informational support. A doula may offer advise with providing evidence-based information. It is not the role of a doula to offer medical care or advice (providing an opinion or recommendation to guide care).

Does insurance provide coverage for a doula?

Minnesota has one of the best coverages afforded to doula care; however, it is limited. Coverage varies by insurance type and provider. For private insurance carriers, participants should contact their provider to see if there is *any* coverage for doula care service. Many doulas will work on a sliding fee scale to offer support for those with no coverage.

For participants enrolled in Medical Assistance (Medicaid), doula services are a covered benefit. Minnesota 2019 Session Law details the following coverage for care by Medicaid under Sec. 36. [256B.758] *REIMBURSEMENT FOR DOULA SERVICES:*

“Effective for services provided on or after July 1, 2019, payments for doula services provided by a certified doula shall be \$47 per prenatal or postpartum visit and \$488 for attending and providing doula services at a birth.”

There is no fee for the Medicaid participant! To qualify for coverage through Medicaid, the doula must be certified and registered by the state.

What do WIC participants need to know?

Offering prenatal and postnatal support is vital to improving the health of the parent and the infant. Similar to WIC staff, a doula may act as an advocate and educator to support the parent on their journey. Participants should be made aware of the many benefits to having a doula join in their birthing experience.

Encourage a participant that is interested in doula support to reach out to inquire about their options for coverage/payment. For participants that are enrolled in or qualify for Medical Assistance, let them know that they may be able to have access to a doula at no cost to them. Additionally, many doulas work on a sliding fee scale to ease the burden of the cost for families whose insurance provides limited or no coverage.

Look for resources near your agency. It may be helpful to create a list of certified doulas to share with participants. [DoulaMatch.net](https://doulamatch.net) offers a search engine where a participant may find a culturally specific list of doulas. By accessing the [More Doula Search Options](#), the list can be filtered by geographical area, race, or language. Additionally, participants may access local birthing centers or maternal health organizations to discover what resources they have to offer parents seeking a doula to join them on their birthing journey.

For more information and materials on the Minnesota Statute that supports workplace protection for those pregnant and/or breast/chestfeeding: refer to the December 29, 2021 memo [Stronger Workplace Protections for Expectant and New Parents - Resources to Share](#).

Resources

1. [Improving Outcomes for Mother and Baby](#) (United Healthcare, 2019)
2. [Impact of Doulas on Healthy Birth Outcomes](#) (The Journal of Perinatal Health, 2013)
3. [Doula care supports near-universal breastfeeding initiation among diverse, low-income women](#) (Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health, 2013)

Please continue to send topic suggestions to Carole.Kelnhofer@state.mn.us.

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[181.939 Nursing Mothers, Lactating Employees, and Pregnancy Accommodations](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=181.939)
(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=181.939>)

[Minnesota Doula Registry](https://www.health.state.mn.us/facilities/providers/doula/index.html)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/facilities/providers/doula/index.html>)

[Standards and Ethics](https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/scope-and-ethics/) (<https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/scope-and-ethics/>)

[DoulaMatch.net](https://doulamatch.net/) (<https://doulamatch.net/>)

[More Doula Search Options](https://doulamatch.net/list/moreoptions) (<https://doulamatch.net/list/moreoptions>)

[Improving Outcomes for Mother and Baby](https://www.uhcommunityandstate.com/content/articles/Improving-Maternal-Health-)
(<https://www.uhcommunityandstate.com/content/articles/Improving-Maternal-Health->

[Impact of Doulas on Healthy Birth Outcomes](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3647727/)
(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3647727/>)

[Doula care supports near-universal breastfeeding initiation among diverse, low-income women](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3742682/)
(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3742682/>)

[Stronger Workplace Protections for Expectant and New Parents - Resources to Share](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2021/topic/1229resources.pdf)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2021/topic/1229resources.pdf>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 85 E 7th Place, PO BOX 64882, ST PAUL MN 55164-0882; 651-201-4404, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-4404