

Advancing Equitable Maternity Care in New Jersey: The Case for Investing in Doula Support

A Proven Strategy for Better Births and Health Equity

Doulas provide emotional, physical, and informational support during pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period. Doulas are not clinically trained and do not provide medical care. Evidence shows that doula support—particularly when delivered by individuals from the same communities as the birthing families—improve outcomes and addresses longstanding inequity in maternal health.

The Economic Case for Doula Care

Doulas help improve maternal and infant health and well-being while reducing system-wide costs. This holds true across community-based and hospital-integrated models of care. Particularly, community doulas focus on providing support within specific communities. They prioritize culturally congruent care, addressing the unique needs and cultural values of the community they serve.



The Impact:



- A comprehensive review of 27 clinical trials found that continuous labor support by a trained doula leads to¹:
 - 39% lower likelihood of cesarean birth
 - 35% lower likelihood of reporting a negative birth experience
 - 15% higher likelihood of spontaneous vaginal birth
- Community doulas have demonstrated reduced rates of low birthweight, preterm birth, and increased rates of breastfeeding.¹
- A study that reviewed data from over 65,000 births covered by Medicaid in the United States projected that scaling access to doula care could prevent over 3,200 preterm births and save more than \$58 million in public health expenditures.²
- In New Jersey, Medicaid began reimbursing doulas in 2019, a critical first step—though low reimbursement rates remain a barrier to workforce growth and program sustainability.³

Demonstrated Impact Across New Jersey: Success from Trenton to Paterson

AMAR Community Doula Program, Trenton

The Children's Home Society of New Jersey launched AMAR in 2019 to support Spanish-speaking families with trained, salaried doulas offering at least four prenatal and four postpartum home visits. The Children's Home Society has expanded services beyond the original AMAR program and now community doulas serve Black and Eastern European communities as well, aiming to reach half of all Trenton births by 2027.

This program has been supported by braided funding, including federal, state, and philanthropic investment, moving the program and its expansion toward a sustainable, equity-centered model for scale.

Impact by AMAR Community Doula Program⁴:

- 65% fewer preterm births
- 88% fewer low birthweight babies
- 16% fewer low-risk cesareans
- 64% exclusively breastfeeding at 3 months postpartum

St. Joseph's Health, Paterson

In 2023, St. Joseph's University Medical Center hired full-time doulas with benefits as members of the maternity care team. Multilingual doulas support families in Spanish, Bengali, Arabic, and American Sign Language alongside physicians, midwives, residents, and nurses.

Early outcomes⁵:

- 74% lower likelihood of preterm birth
- 63% lower likelihood of low-risk cesarean
- Nearly 2x higher rate of postpartum visit attendance
- Patient satisfaction scores averaging 9.8/10




Unlocking the Full Potential of Doula Care in New Jersey

Doulas are essential partners in a high-quality, equitable maternity care system. Yet access to doula care remains inconsistent due to low reimbursement rate from NJ Medicaid insurance, limited workforce pathways, inconsistent hospital integration, and lack of public awareness about the benefit.

New Jersey can advance and sustain doula care by:


- Increasing Medicaid reimbursement and streamlining credentialing and billing processes, so doulas can easily enroll as providers for NJ FamilyCare and each managed care organization and are well-compensated for their full services
- Funding community-based programs and training pipelines rooted in cultural competence
- Supporting policies and practices that position doulas as respected, valued members of care teams
- Educating NJ Medicaid members about the benefits of community doula support and how to access covered services

The Bottom Line



Investing in doula care yields powerful returns: **healthier births, lower public health costs, and greater maternal and infant health equity.**

These are not “nice to have” programs—they are **essential interventions backed by evidence and community demand.**



¹ Bohren, M. A., Hofmeyr, G. J., Sakala, C., Fukuzawa, R. K., & Cuthbert, A. (2017). Continuous support for women during childbirth: Key takeaways. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 2017(7), CD003766.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD003766.pub6>

² Kozhimannil, K. B., Hardeman, R. R., Alarid-Escudero, F., Vogelsang, C. A., Blauer-Peterson, C., & Howell, E. A. (2016). Modeling the cost-effectiveness of doula care associated with reductions in preterm birth and cesarean delivery. Birth, 43(1), 20–27.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/birt.12218>

³ New Jersey Department of Human Services. (2021, January 1). Medicaid/NJ FamilyCare coverage of doula services [NJMMIS Newsletter No. 31-04]. Retrieved from <https://www.njmmis.com/downloadDocuments/31-04.pdf>

⁴ Outcomes from the AMAR program are based on self-reported data for 329 pregnant people and compared to Medicaid birth data for the same time period in Trenton, New Jersey.

⁵ Data from St. Joseph's Health are derived from internal sources, including electronic medical records (EMRs) and birth certificates, and compare outcomes between patients who received doula support and those who did not during the same timeframe.