

Iowa Title V Community-Based Doula Project for African American Families



The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) has recognized disparities in Maternal Health outcomes among African American/Black-identifying individuals in Iowa. IDPH seeks to reduce these disparities by modifying, expanding and enhancing Iowa's Maternal Child Health Title V Service Delivery System to include a community-based, culturally congruent doula program as a service offering.

Project Goal

IDPH used a health equity lens and collaborated with African American/Black-identified community members and local maternal health experts to develop a culturally congruent, community-based doula program within the state's Title V service delivery structure. As a result of this collaboration, IDPH will conduct a pilot project in selected communities to determine and develop a strategy for culturally congruent, community-based doula services for Title V agencies throughout the state.



Project Key Activities

- Serve at least 40 African American/Black families in the first year using a culturally congruent, community-based doula program model administered through five Title V agencies.
- Build upon the current network of the certified community-based doulas, including members of the Iowa Black Doula Collective, by providing formal doula training to additional African American/Black families in host site communities to increase the number of community resources available to African American/Black families, as well as diversify the perinatal workforce in Iowa.
- Increase the rate of African American/Black families who initiate prenatal care in their first trimester of pregnancy. Currently only 68% of Black pregnant families in Iowa receive their first prenatal care visit in the first trimester of pregnancy compared to 87% of white families in Iowa.
- Provide skills and competencies for breastfeeding support for doulas providing services through the program through additional training in order to build culturally congruent community supports for breastfeeding. Currently only 69% of Black families in Iowa breastfeed at the time of hospital discharge compared to 84% of white families in Iowa.
- Produce supportive data, return on investment, and cost savings information to establish the business case for the consideration of doula service reimbursement by insurers.

Project Outcomes and Impacts

- Improve maternal health outcomes for African American/Black families in Iowa.
- Increase breastfeeding initiation rates for infants born to African American/Black families in Iowa who participate in the community-based, culturally congruent doula program.
- Establish the business case for reimbursement for doula service reimbursement by insurers.

Iowa's Title V Doula Project

Project Funding

- PHHS Block Grant Program, administered by CDC's Center for State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Support
- Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant Program
- Mid-Iowa Health Foundation



Current Project Partners

- Certified Community-Based Doulas, including members of the Iowa Black Doula Collective
- Iowa Department of Human Services, Iowa Medicaid Enterprise
- University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine
- University of Iowa Institute for Clinical and Translational Science
- Supporting Title V Maternal Health and Child Health Screening Centers include:
 - Allen Women's Health (Black Hawk County)
 - Black Hawk County Health Department
 - Visiting Nurse Association (Dubuque County), UnityPoint Health (Dubuque County)
 - EveryStep Care and Support Services (Polk County)
 - Scott County Health Department



What is a Doula?

A birth doula is a companion who supports a woman during labor and birth. Birth doulas are trained to provide continuous, one-on-one care, as well as information, physical support, and emotional support to women and their partners. (Dekker 2019)

What Does a Doula Do?

Prenatal Period: A doula provides prenatal education, preparing families to make educated, well-informed birthing and parenting choices.

Birthing: A doula provides physical and emotional support during labor and delivery, increasing the mother's feelings of safety and comfort. They provide non-medical pain management techniques that decrease the need for unnecessary and expensive medical interventions. Doulas also facilitate positive communication between the woman and their health care providers.

Postpartum Period: A doula provides immediate postpartum support by helping initiate breastfeeding and enhancing a family's confidence in caring for a newborn. Long-term doula care provides support and education for proper infant nutrition and health. They also serve as a trusted source of information and referrals for a wide variety of needs that a new family may have.

In What Ways Do Doulas Help to Address Maternal Morbidity (Disability) and Mortality (Death)?

- Researchers have reported that doula care is a high-value model that improves childbirth outcomes, increases care quality, and holds the potential to achieve cost savings.
- Doula support to families during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum periods reduce cesarean deliveries, prematurity, and illness in newborns, and the likelihood of postpartum depression.
- Families who received doula care reported higher overall satisfaction with the experience of childbirth care and increased breastfeeding initiation and duration.



Dekker, R. (2019, May 4). Evidence on Doulas. Retrieved from Evidence Based Birth: <http://evidencebasedbirth.com/the-evidence-for-doulas/>

Why is it Important to Utilize Culturally Congruent and Community-Based Doulas?

- Community-based doula programs address issues of access and cost within underserved communities.
- Community-based programs offer a more comprehensive support model than traditional doula support. An embedded community-based doula is able to provide a wide variety of local services and referrals through a home visiting model.
- Community-based doulas are trusted professionals rooted in an understanding of the physical and emotional impacts of things like experiencing racism and intergenerational trauma. Their lived experience recognizes these impacts and stress this causes families as they navigate health care systems. This perspective was highlighted in client responses in Iowa's 2020 Title V Needs Assessment, underscoring the importance of diversifying Iowa's perinatal workforce:



"Find a doctor that look like you...because they're gonna understand you a little bit differently...going to treat you a little bit differently...and that's hard to do. That's, shoot, because of where we live, that's dang near impossible. But if you can find somebody that understands our diversity, our culture a little bit differently...I think you ended up having better experiences and even if they don't necessarily look like you, but if they understand the struggle."

- Black Hawk County, Maternal Health African-American Participant, 2020 Title V Needs Assessment, IDPH

Why Focus Specifically on African American/Black Women for this Pilot Project?

- Iowa's population health data shows that the greatest disparities exist in maternal health outcomes for African American/Black women.
- Iowa's African American/Black women experiences higher rates of severe maternal morbidity as well as maternal mortality.
- Additionally, Iowa's maternal health data shows disparities in supportive maternal health behaviors such as accessing prenatal care in the first trimester and rates of breastfeeding. Given the documented improvements in maternal health outcomes associated with the use of doulas, IDPH has identified the doula project as an intervention to implement in order to reduce the maternal health disparities experienced by Iowa's African American/Black mothers.
- Data will be tracked so that the outcomes associated with this pilot project have the opportunity to be applied across all Title V populations at a later date.

Community-Based Doulas: A Valuable Addition to Your Care Team

Doula (doo - luh):

A birth doula is a companion who supports a woman during labor and birth. Birth doulas are trained to provide continuous, one-on-one care, as well as information, physical support, and emotional support to women and their partners. (Dekker 2019)



Evidence Supports It

A Cochrane review showed the “best results occurred when a birthing person had continuous labor support from a doula– someone who was NOT a staff member at the hospital and who was NOT part of their social network. The researchers found that overall, people who have continuous support during childbirth experience decreased risk of Cesarean, increased likelihood of a spontaneous vaginal birth, decrease in the use of medications, shorter labors, a decrease in the baby’s risk of a low five minute Apgar, and a decreased risk of being dissatisfied with the birth experience.” (Bohren, 2017)

It's A Community-Based Solution

“Community-based doulas reduce barriers and prioritize peer support in communities experiencing significant inequities in maternal and infant health outcomes. These doulas are trusted members of the community and provide services that improve prenatal care, raise breastfeeding rates, decrease unnecessary medical intervention, increase positive birth experiences, and improve parenting skills.” (Mather, 2021)

Well-Trained and Prepared

In order to practice, doulas must successfully complete an approved certifying agency’s labor doula training. Approved trainings require 16-20 hours of live, in-person instruction based on the best evidence based research on labor support. These training curriculums cover a variety of essential topics including scope of practice, code of ethics, labor stages, comfort measures, newborn care, postpartum support, and community resources.

Bohren MA, Hofmeyr GJ, Sakala C, Fukuzawa RK, Cuthbert A. Continuous support for women during childbirth. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2017 Jul 6;7(7):CD003766. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD003766.pub6. PMID: 28681500; PMCID: PMC6483123.

Dekker, R. (2019, May 4). Evidence on Doulas. Retrieved from Evidence Based Birth: <http://evidencebasedbirth.com/the-evidence-for-doulas/>

Mather, C. (2021, April 15). How Community Based Doulas Can Help Address the Black Maternal Mortality Crisis. Retrieved from Institute for Healthcare Improvement: http://www.ihi.org/communities/blogs/how-community-based-doulas-can-help-address-the-black-maternal-mortality-crisis?utm_campaign=tw&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=122306774&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9U-f6lxdckmqSCp0AWXpJP6pezRc4J-Lbq4id-MWmK7IMjVtmyIJK3Ntrz1oDLAWyFJG8JnWB

What Doulas Do:

- Provide up-to-date evidence based information.
- Encourage positive communication between clients and providers.
- Support all birthing preferences.
- Advocate for the family's birthing preferences.
- Encourage the birthing family to ask questions and verbalize their needs.
- Provide non-judgmental, unbiased emotional and physical support.



What Doulas Do Not Do:

- Give medical advice.
- Make decisions for their clients.
- Only support "natural" birth.
- Take the place of a partner.
- Offer personal opinions.
- Perform medical tasks.