



# DOULA CARE IN NEW YORK CITY: MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR WOMEN & FAMILIES

## SAFER, HEALTHIER, MORE SATISFYING BIRTHS

*"I would recommend having a doula to all of my friends. It was like having a wise travel guide through the experience."*

First-time mother, Brooklyn

New York City families of all backgrounds are inviting doulas to join their birth teams, and doulas are making a difference. Doulas are non-medical birth professionals trained to provide emotional, physical, and informational support to a woman and her family. Expanding access to doula care can help more women have safer, healthier, and more satisfying births.

*"One of the most effective tools to improve labor and delivery outcomes is the continuous presence of support personnel, such as a doula."*

"Safe Prevention of the Primary Cesarean Delivery," Consensus Statement issued by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, February 2014

## Safer Births, Fewer Complications

Guidelines issued in 2014 by The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine include doula support among their recommendations for reducing the high rates of cesareans.

One in three babies in New York City, and throughout the US, is born surgically. Cesareans are life-saving when needed, but they also carry risks of complications. Data shows that rising cesarean rates are contributing to an increase in complications for women and babies, and efforts to bring cesarean rates down are growing.

*"Birth, in general, is the most vulnerable place a woman can be. Having someone there who can lead you safely, who knows you, can be your ambassador, is ... important in the foreign environment of a hospital, where most people don't feel comfortable."*

Labor and Delivery Nurse, New York City

## Comfort in Labor

Doulas offer a range of techniques to relieve discomfort in labor including massage, movement, and the use of baths and showers. These strategies can help women feel comfortable, calm, and supported, whether they plan to give birth with or without an epidural.

*"Having a doula was the best choice we could have made. She was our partner, our advocate and now our friend. I truly believe that it was because of her that I had the birth I wanted."*

Home birth mother, Queens

## Proven benefits of doula care:

- 28% reduction in cesareans
- Fewer forceps and vacuum births
- Less use of epidurals
- Shorter labors
- Higher APGAR scores for babies
- Increased breastfeeding rates
- Improved satisfaction & feelings about birth

## Emotional Well-being

Prioritizing women's emotional well-being in labor helps women maintain a healthy hormonal balance. Research suggests that feeling safe and private during labor facilitates the release of natural hormones that help labor and birth progress, assist breastfeeding, and promote mother-baby bonding.

*"Doulas are a huge tool for empowerment, knowledge and advocacy. Hands-down, having my doula present for my birth was paramount."*

First-time mother, Manhattan

## Breastfeeding Support

Doula care contributes to the success of breastfeeding, which offers health benefits for mothers and babies. Women who breastfeed can speed their recovery from birth and reduce the risk of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, postpartum depression, and ovarian and breast cancer. In babies, breastfeeding strengthens the immune system, promotes mother-baby bonding, and lowers the risk of asthma, obesity, diabetes, and ear infections.

*"The breastfeeding felt as hard as the labor. I'm crying. He's crying. We're both crying.... Because of the care and support of the doula, I just got to see past the day, and then, it got better. I don't know if I would have been able to do it without support."*

Mother, CiC Focus Group

## Having a Satisfying Birth

Women who give birth with doula support report more positive experiences of childbirth. Doulas provide information and resources that help women prepare for labor and facilitate positive communication between women and their doctors or midwives. Having a sense of control and engagement in health care decision-making are key factors in ensuring a satisfying experience.

## DOULA CARE IN NYC: CHANGING THE SYSTEM

### The Need for Doulas in New York City

According to Choices in Childbirth's new report, *Doula Care in New York City: Advancing the Goals of the Affordable Care Act*, there is an immediate need for system-wide improvements in maternity care practices. Despite being the leading city for medical education, women in New York City face high rates of birth-related health complications while health care costs skyrocket.

Doula care is an effective, evidence-based strategy to improve childbirth for all of New York City's women and babies. Yet currently, **only about 5% of births are attended by doulas**. Widespread access to doula care is critically needed in New York City.

*"The doula is essential to helping the woman come to the hospital when labor is active. The doula can help the patient stay mobile – to stay out of bed and labor in the position they want to labor in... That's the magic ingredient, and you can't have that without a doula."*

Dr. Jaqueline Worth, Obstetrician, New York City

### Doulas Improve Birth Outcomes & Lower Costs

Most women giving birth in NYC are in good health with low-risk pregnancies. Medical interventions are sometimes necessary, but using medical procedures in situations where there is no demonstrated benefit is driving up the cost of care, causing preventable complications, and increasing dissatisfaction. Doulas can help reduce spending on non-beneficial procedures and avoidable complications. Those savings can balance the cost of doula care, while improving health outcomes and satisfaction at the same time.

*"My doula gave me my voice and reminded me of the birth plan that I wanted. I was able to stick with the plan. I felt I wouldn't have been as strong without her support."*

Mother, Harlem

### An Essential Strategy to Improve Maternity Care

Evidence shows that doula care can help fulfill the Affordable Care Act's "triple aim" of:

- **Improving health outcomes for all**
- **Improving the experience of care**
- **Reducing the cost of care**

### Doulas Reduce Racial & Economic Disparities

Race, ethnicity, and income level affect pregnancy outcomes for women and babies.

- African American women in NYC are nearly 7 times as likely as white women to die from complications of pregnancy or birth, and Hispanic women face twice the risk of white women.
- African American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander women in NYC all have higher cesarean rates than white women.
- White women are most likely to feed their babies exclusively breastmilk (45%) during the first 5 days following birth, compared with 27% of African American women, 24% of Hispanic women, and 23% of Asian and Pacific Islander women.

Ensuring access to doula support for women most at-risk of poor health outcomes can reduce disparities, and improve the health and care of those with the greatest need. Community-based doula programs offer no-cost, culturally appropriate doula support to women in underserved communities.

Community-based programs in NYC serve about 450 women each year. These programs show positive results, improving care practices, elevating the voices of women in disenfranchised communities, and linking women with additional support services.

Choices in Childbirth's new report concludes that childbirth facilities, maternity care providers, and government agencies should prioritize making doula care available, affordable, and effective for more women.

**New York City's families deserve no less!**

### Practices at Your Hospital or Birth Center?

Ask your care provider if the facility where you plan to give birth has policies that are doula-friendly.

#### Does your hospital:

- **Allow doulas to remain present** at all times in labor and birth?
- **Respect a laboring woman's desire to remain mobile** whenever possible and provide inexpensive equipment such as birth balls, squat bars, or birthing stools?
- **Offer intermittent monitoring?** (Policies requiring continuous electronic monitoring should be revised because the practice is not supported by medical evidence).

### What Can You Do?

- **Share this information** with your friends, family, and social network to raise awareness about the benefits of doula care.
- **For more information about finding a doula**, ask your doctor or midwife for a list of doulas, seek referrals from friends, and inquire on neighborhood list-serves and online doula network sites. For lower-cost or free doula care consider a newer doula who is gaining experience or contact a local community-based organization.
- **Find us at [www.choicesinchildbirth.org](http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org)** for more information on local hospitals, mother-friendly service providers (including doulas), or community-based doula programs; to read *Doula Care in New York City*; or to get involved in increasing access to doula care in NYC.

Choices in Childbirth (CIC) is a non-profit organization focused on ensuring that all women have access to maternity care that is safe, healthy, equitable, and empowering. Our mission is to promote evidence-based, mother-friendly childbirth options through public education, consumer advocacy, and pioneering policy reform. We seek to improve maternity care by providing the public, especially childbearing women and their families, with the information necessary to make fully informed decisions relating to how, where, and with whom they will give birth. Our advocacy and policy work is directed towards supporting implementation of evidence-based care practices that will result in better health outcomes for women and their babies, greater patient satisfaction, and increased engagement of women in their own care.

Visit us at [www.choicesinchildbirth.org/our-work/advocacy-policy/reports-fact-sheets/](http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/our-work/advocacy-policy/reports-fact-sheets/) to view the full report, *Doula Care in New York City: Advancing the Goals of the Affordable Care Act*.