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Contact: [Lauren Sogor](mailto:Lauren.Sogor@nationalpartnership.org), 202.986.2600

Widespread Insurance Coverage of Doula Care Would Reduce Costs, Improve Maternal and Infant Health

Leading Maternity Care Experts Release Issue Brief Encouraging Medicaid and Private Insurers to Cover Doula Care

WASHINGTON, D.C. – January 5, 2016 – At this time when most experts agree that not nearly enough women in this country receive high-quality maternity care, federal and state government agencies and health insurers should make doula care an option for more women by covering doula services. An issue brief released today by two leading maternity care advocates makes a powerful case for the health benefits of doula care for women and babies and the significant cost reductions that would result if more women used doulas – trained professionals who provide non-clinical emotional, physical and informational support before, during and after childbirth. The brief, ***Overdue: Medicaid and Private Insurance Coverage of Doula Care***, is co-authored by Choices in Childbirth and Childbirth Connection, a program of the National Partnership for Women & Families.

In the brief, the authors summarize research showing that doula care reduces the likelihood of interventions such as cesarean birth and epidural while supporting shorter labor, spontaneous vaginal birth and other benefits to mom and baby. As the use of interventions decreases, so do associated costs, making coverage of doula care a cost-effective strategy for public and private insurers alike. The authors estimate that the reduction in cesarean births from the use of doula care could save Medicaid at least \$646 million per year, and private insurers around \$1.73 billion annually.

“Widespread coverage of doula care is overdue,” said Michele Giordano, executive director of Choices in Childbirth. “Overwhelming evidence shows that giving women access to doula care improves their health, their infants’ health, and their satisfaction with and experience of care. Women of color and low-income women stand to benefit even more from access to doula care because they are at increased risk for poor maternal and infant outcomes. Now is the time to take concrete steps to ensure that all women can experience the benefits of doula care.”

“Doula care is exactly the kind of value-based, patient-centered care we need to support as we transform our health care system into one that delivers better care and better outcomes at lower cost,” said Debra L. Ness, president of the National Partnership. “By expanding coverage for doula care, decision-makers at all levels and across sectors – federal and state, public and private – have an opportunity to improve maternal and infant health while reducing health care costs.”

The brief provides key recommendations to expand insurance coverage for doula across the country:

- Congress should designate birth doula services as a mandated Medicaid benefit for

pregnant women based on evidence that doula support is a cost-effective strategy to improve birth outcomes of women and babies and reduce health disparities, with no known harms.

- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) should develop a clear, standardized pathway for establishing reimbursement for doula services, including prenatal and postpartum visits and continuous labor support, in all state Medicaid agencies and Medicaid managed care plans. CMS should provide guidance and technical assistance to states to facilitate this coverage.
- State Medicaid agencies should take advantage of the recent revision of the Preventive Services Rule, 42 CFR §440.130(c), to amend their state plans to cover doula support. States should also include access to doula support in new and existing Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) waiver programs.
- The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force should determine whether continuous labor support by a trained doula falls within the scope of its work and, if so, should determine whether labor support by a trained doula meets its criteria for recommended preventive services.
- Managed care organizations and other private insurance plans as well as relevant innovative payment and delivery systems with options for enhanced benefits should include support by a trained doula as a covered service.
- State legislatures should mandate private insurance coverage of doula services.

The issue brief and a new infographic illustrating the importance of coverage for doula care are available at <http://Transform.ChildbirthConnection.org/Reports/Doula> and www.choicesinchildbirth.org/our-work/advocacy-policy/doulacoverage.

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About Choices in Childbirth

Choices in Childbirth is a non-profit organization located in New York City that works to ensure 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, advocacy, and innovative policy reform. Learn more at www.ChoicesinChildbirth.org.

About the National Partnership for Women & Families

The National Partnership for Women & Families, a non-profit organization founded in 1971 and located in Washington, D.C., promotes reproductive and maternal-newborn health and rights; access to quality, affordable health care; and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of employment and family. Founded in 1918, Childbirth Connection became a core program of the National Partnership in 2014. Childbirth Connection programs serve as a voice for the needs and interests of childbearing women and families, and work to improve the quality and value of maternity care through consumer engagement and health system transformation. Learn more at <http://Transform.ChildbirthConnection.org> and www.NationalPartnership.org.