

DOULAS: PROVIDING TRUSTED CARE THAT IMPROVES HEALTH AND SAVES MONEY.

Doulas play an important role in supporting Kansas families, offering significant benefits to both mothers and babies. Their presence has been shown to improve health outcomes, enhance the birthing experience and reduce health care costs. In Kansas, the urgency for solutions like doula care is clear. Nearly half of all counties are classified as maternal health care deserts, forcing many women to travel long distances to access essential services. Doulas, who provide non-medical support, can help bridge this growing gap in care, particularly in rural communities. They provide continuous emotional, physical and informational support during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period. Integrating doula support into the maternal health landscape is a promising, cost-effective strategy to ensure mothers across our state receive the support they deserve, no matter where they live.

DOULA CARE

WHAT ARE DOULAS?

Doulas are professionals trained in childbirth who provide emotional support, physical comfort and guidance to pregnant women and families. They serve as advocates and educators, working alongside health care providers to ensure mothers feel informed, supported and empowered throughout their pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum. They do not provide any medical care or make any clinical decisions, unlike physicians or midwives.

Doulas are widely recognized by national and international organizations as beneficial in improving maternal health outcomes, including by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the World Health Organization.

PARTNERS IN CARE

Doula care complements, not replaces, the work of doctors, nurses and midwives. By building trust and rapport with families, doulas can help reduce fear and anxiety, which can contribute to complications during labor. Doulas help women experience a positive and safe birth, staying by their side throughout delivery to provide encouragement and comfort measures. They can provide pain relief by using techniques that include massage, breathing exercises and suggesting optimal positions for laboring.

They also can make home visits and maintain more frequent contact with expecting mothers, which helps bridge the gap between overloaded physicians and their patients. After birth, they can help mothers begin breastfeeding, which provides health benefits to both moms and babies and encourages bonding between them.



DEDICATED ADVOCATES

Navigating the complexities of the health care system can be overwhelming for many families. Doulas serve as trusted advocates throughout pregnancy and delivery, helping families understand their options, ask the right questions and adhere to medical advice. Their guidance helps ensure mothers will attend prenatal appointments, follow care plans and are better prepared for childbirth. This, in turn, reduces complications, stress and costs. It also helps improve communication between mothers and their medical providers.

CARE TEAM ROLES



PHYSICIAN

Provides ALL levels of medical care.

- ✓ Performs surgeries
- ✓ Diagnoses medical conditions
- ✓ Provides medical treatment
- ✓ Prescribes and administers medication
- ✓ Delivers babies



NURSE OR MIDWIFE

Provides MANY levels of medical care.

- ✓ Diagnoses medical conditions
- ✓ Provides medical treatment
- ✓ Prescribes and administers medication
- ✓ Delivers babies

** These abilities are based on the person's qualifications and scope of care.*



DOULA

Provides NO level of medical care.

- ✓ Serves alongside the medical team, providing social, emotional and informational support
- ✓ Provides general health education and support navigating the health system
- ✓ Connects families to helpful resources
- ✓ Provides comfort measures like massage, breathing exercises and laboring position guidance



TRAINING & PAYMENT

In Kansas, doulas must receive certification in order to provide services under the state’s Medicaid program, KanCare. To become certified, they must:

- Complete 30 hours of training in any combination of 14 different areas, such as childbirth education, reproductive health counseling and lactation support OR receive certification from one of eight eligible training organizations
- Provide doula support at a minimum of three births

Doula care can be paid for in a variety of ways, including:

- Out of pocket by the mother/family for an hourly or flat rate
- Health savings account or flexible spending account
- Private insurance plan, though not commonly covered
- KanCare, thanks to newly updated coverage guidelines

KanCare began recognizing doulas as non-physician providers in 2024, making them eligible for reimbursement when providing care to enrollees. Doulas are reimbursed in addition to medical providers, such as OBGYNs, and at a lower rate. KanCare pays doulas \$15 per 15-minute visit and \$500 for each birth.

BENEFITS

1 BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES

Studies have shown that doula care improves the health outcomes for mothers and babies. These benefits include:

- Fewer birth complications
- Fewer C-section surgeries
- Decreased likelihood of delivering an underweight baby
- Decreased need for pain-relief medication during labor
- Shortened time in labor
- Increased breastfeeding rates, which contributes to healthier moms and babies
- Reduced anxiety and stress for expecting mothers

2 BETTER EXPERIENCES

Doulas play a unique role in building trust with mothers, which is especially helpful for communities that may face discrimination or systemic barriers in health care. Developing these relationships with families provides a variety of benefits, including:

- Ensuring mothers attend prenatal appointments, follow care plans and are prepared for childbirth, all of which reduce complications and costs
- Ensuring mothers feel heard and respected within the health care system and receive culturally appropriate care

- Reducing the burden on overworked, overloaded physicians by serving as a resource throughout pregnancy and bridging workforce gaps
- Filling emotional and informational needs that physicians may not have the time to fully address due to high patient loads and time constraints

3 FINANCIAL & ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Investing in doulas is a cost-effective strategy, as they have an out-sized impact on improving health outcomes and reducing overall health care costs. Financial benefits include:

- Cost avoidance by preventing costly surgeries, medical interventions and neonatal intensive care
- Saving money on hospital readmissions and managing medical complications
- Saving Medicaid dollars, which can then be distributed elsewhere
- Estimated savings of up to about \$1,200 per birth, according to a 2024 cost-benefit analysis of doula care from a public health framework conducted by the University of California San Francisco’s Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health and the National Health Law Program.



MOTHERS WHO USE DOULAS ARE:

2X LESS LIKELY TO HAVE BIRTH COMPLICATIONS

4X LESS LIKELY TO DELIVER AN UNDERWEIGHT BABY

+ LESS LIKELY TO NEED MEDICAL INTERVENTIONS

\$ SAVING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM MONEY