



Addressing Health Inequities in Maternal Health with Doulas/Community Health Advocates

WHEN does the program begin?



The program began in October 2021 and will continue to be implemented throughout October 2022 in Los Angeles County.

HOW does a doula/CHA work?



Meetings between the doula/CHA and mother/birthing family to better understand the client's personal history, support needs, and birth preferences.

Development of individualized birth plans with clients to mitigate stress and ensure an empowered and healthy childbirth experience.

Attendance of childbirth to support labor/delivery and postpartum mother/parent-baby bonding, including skin-to-skin, sleeping in the room and lactation education.

WHO will doulas/CHAs serve?



The Frontline Doulas: Centering the Community Program will match culturally congruent, trauma-informed community doulas, who will act in a dual role as a doula and community health advocate, with underrepresented mothers/birthing people in Los Angeles County.

WHAT is a doula/community health advocate (CHA)?



Doulas can provide family centered services, that are trauma informed, to encourage safe and respectful care to birthing communities that have been historically marginalized.

Supports birthing people in prenatal visits, labor, and delivery, and post-delivery follow up.

Provides physical, culturally appropriate emotional, and informational support.

Conducts screenings prior to delivery for emotional wellness and health concerns.

Provides referrals to any needed mental health, trauma-targeted or social service needs.



Health Reimagined

Maternal Child Health Equity Initiative

Blue Shield of California is transforming care by addressing the perpetual racial health inequities that directly impact the maternal health of families and their infants with a new initiative. To address these issues, Blue Shield is providing doulas with community health advocate (CHA) training to become champions on behalf of families and infants.

The Maternal Child Health Equity Initiative will embed these trauma-informed doulas who will serve a dual role as a doula and community health advocate into the maternal health landscape. The doula/CHA will help reduce and mitigate infant health inequities and improve the health care experience for families and infants.

In Los Angeles County, the Maternal Child Health Equity Initiative is partnering with Frontline Doulas and Diversity Uplifts, Inc. This partnership will provide culturally responsive support programs to drive equitable health outcomes for families and infants. The Frontline Doulas - Centering the Community Program, places birthing families with community-based doulas that center the experiences and voices of the community.

In support of the Maternal Child Health Equity Initiative, trained and experienced doulas will be recruited and hired to serve a dual role as a doula/CHA. The doula/CHA will assist in mitigating the perpetual racial health inequities and racially biased maternal care gaps by addressing maternal care needs, social barriers, and maternal disparities. Specifically, they will improve prenatal and postpartum support systems, advocate for improved quality of maternal care, and provide social need resource referrals like access to nutrition and housing supports, if needed, to support the whole person.

When will this program be available?

Phase 1 of this program began in October 2021. Phase 2 has been extended through October 2022.

What are the benefits of the Maternal Child Health Equity Initiative?

This initiative will lead to families receiving equitable pre and postpartum quality of services that drive and support improved patient experience, improved patient satisfaction, increased access to social services, increased access to community resources, and increased usage of high-value medical services.

How is this different from the way it has worked in the past?

Most of our health is dictated by elements outside the healthcare system. This program brings care to where people are to address their social needs, focus on prevention, and build towards community-wide system change that leads to high-impact, sustainable, and equitable outcomes. This initiative takes a trauma informed and resilience focused approach to care – combined with a client and culture centered approach to enhance maternal mental and physical wellbeing.



Addressing health inequities with the Maternal Child Health Equity Initiative

The Maternal Child Health Equity Initiative will assist in transforming the perpetual racial health inequities and racially biased maternal care gaps by addressing maternal care needs and maternal health disparities in the community. The program's goal is to develop prenatal and postpartum support systems, improving access to critical maternal care services, and providing social need resource referrals.

Tanisha, a 22-year-old single Black woman is pregnant with her first child. She lives in Los Angeles and works full time. She is struggling with several health challenges and needs support. Her doctor is aware of a doula program offered through The Frontline Doulas. The Frontline Doulas - Centering the Community Program connects her to Jasmine, a trauma informed doula/community health advocate that will guide her through the birthing process— providing her with emotional, informational, and physical support throughout her pregnancy and after she gives birth.

In their first meeting, Jasmine asks Tanisha questions to learn about her pregnancy so far: how she is feeling; what fears or excitement she has about giving birth and being a mom; and what kind of support she has at home, within her family, and/or her community. They also discuss the additional support Tanisha, and her partner/family expects they will need. Jasmine checks in with Tanisha regularly to discuss nutrition, stress, and any questions she has about her pregnancy. Jasmine listens to Tanisha's concerns and coordinates a plan to help her access resources like local support groups for new moms, breastfeeding support, nutritious foods, and childcare options. They also create a food and exercise plan to keep both Tanisha and her baby as healthy as possible. They schedule monthly phone dates to check in on Tanisha's progress, and ensure that Tanisha feels supported and heard by her prenatal provider. Jasmine often leads Tanisha in breathing and meditation/mindfulness exercises to encourage stress reduction over the course of the pregnancy. Finally, they work together to create Tanisha's birth plan and Jasmine ensures that Tanisha is educated and prepared for the childbirth process, teaching her about the stages of labor, pain management and comfort strategies.

When Tanisha goes into early labor, Jasmine assesses her needs and makes some helpful recommendations over the phone. They decide that Jasmine should meet her at the hospital as her birthing sensations become more intense. Jasmine supports her through her delivery to help reduce stress, pain and trauma as well as suggest different labor and birthing positions. With her help, Tanisha welcomes a healthy baby girl and has a positive birth experience. Jasmine does an initial postpartum home visit and continues to check in with Tanisha after her birth to answer any questions regarding her healing, breastfeeding and infant care. Tanisha is grateful to Jasmine for helping her create a plan for transition and adjustment to her new baby and learning the importance of accepting support and asking for help.



*"Fostering Diversity & Supporting Communities
and the Providers who Serve them."*

