

## Doula

Childbirth is one of the most amazing experiences that a woman has the pleasure of going through. While it is no easy task, support is essential for a healthy mom and baby. Spouses, significant others, family and friends typically usually fill those gaps, but there is more help out there. **Have you heard of a doula?**



### What is a doula?

A doula provides guidance and support to pregnant women and their families before, during and post pregnancy. While doulas are “**non-medical**” professionals and cannot deliver babies, they can make sure that the pregnant woman’s needs are met. Based upon each birther’s needs, a doula can perform many different roles. They can support mothers emotionally and physically. Doulas can also provide mothers with informational support, newborn feeding, self-care/help, communication and with recovery.

### How can doulas provide support?

Doulas provide emotional support by providing mothers and/or expectant mothers with comfort and reassurance and physical support by suggesting various coping methods like comfortable position and breathing techniques. Information and communication are also means by which doulas can support moms and moms-to-be. They give them non-medical information on childbirth and can help with decisions on birth interventions. Doulas can attend appointments with mothers to aid in expressing their concerns and preferences as



well as in asking questions. They also offer assistance in self-care and in recovery, both physically and emotionally, from birth.

Doulas are often trusted members of the community they serve and are well-suited to address issues related to discrimination and other drivers of disparities by bridging language and cultural gaps and serving as health navigators. Further, they often provide additional services tailored to the specific needs of the community including prenatal and postpartum home visits, which reduce travel and logistic issues for clients; breastfeeding education and consultation; and referral and navigation assistance for additional needs such as social services.<sup>1</sup> According to the March of Dimes, a focus group study of low-income pregnant women found that access to doulas can mitigate the effects of social determinants of health by addressing health literacy and social support needs. For example, doulas can help improve communication between low-income, racially/ethnically diverse pregnant women and their health care providers.<sup>2</sup>

### **Where to find a doula?**

Doulas are scarce in Alabama, but projects like AlaR.I.S.E. ( Alabama Resources Information Support & Empowerment, a Maternal Care Coordination program, is working to make trained Doula services available for free in (Butler, Clarke, Hale, Marengo, Monroe). To locate a doula, ask friends, family and/or your healthcare provider for suggestions. Upon finding one, have a meeting or interview to ensure you are comfortable with him/her. For more information on AlaRISE CHW/Doula Services, please contact Project Director, Adrian Collier at [adrian.collier@wcaahec.org](mailto:adrian.collier@wcaahec.org).

### **References**

<sup>1</sup>Knocke K., Chappel A., Sugar S., De Lew N, Sommers BD. Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation-Office of Health Policy: Doula Care and Maternal Health: An Evidence Review; Issue Brief, December 13, 2022

<sup>2</sup>Kozhimannil KB, Vogelsang CA, Hardeman RR, Prasad S. Disrupting the Pathways of Social Determinants of Health: Doula Support during Pregnancy and Childbirth. J Am Board Fam Med 2016;29(3):308-17. 21.

The 2024-2028 AlaRISE Maternal Care Coordination Program is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling approximately \$1.8M with 0 percentage financed with nongovernmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.