



## Expanding Access to Doulas to Combat the Maternal Health Crisis

### **Doulas and Medicaid are key to reversing rising maternal mortality rates.<sup>1</sup>**

States are battling a nationwide maternal health crisis, with escalating maternal mortality rates not seen since the 1960s. Maternal mortality rates increased by nearly 38% from 2020 to 2021, and nearly doubled from 2018 to 2021.<sup>2</sup> Poor maternal health outcomes are driven by a variety of factors, including social drivers of health, such as maternity care deserts, workplace challenges, unstable access to food and housing, and racism. Significant disparities in maternal health outcomes persist as Black women are nearly three times more likely than white women to die during pregnancy or childbirth.<sup>3</sup>

### **Doula services result in safer births and healthier moms.**

Full-spectrum doulas provide a range of perinatal services that improve maternal health outcomes, including prenatal visits to plan for birth and having a child, connections to community resources, support and advocacy, labor and delivery assistance, lactation consultations, and other postpartum services. In fact, studies have shown doulas decrease the rates of pre-term birth, birth complications, postpartum depression, and medical interventions and severe complications during pregnancy and birth, while also increasing rates of breastfeeding.<sup>4</sup> Expanding access to doulas through Medicaid presents states with an enormous opportunity to combat the maternal health crisis as Medicaid covers 42% of all births nationwide.<sup>5</sup>

**DOULAS SAVE COSTS BY REDUCING THE OCCURRENCE OF:**

Pre-term births



Postpartum depression



C-sections

**States need to provide licensure or certification pathways and expand Medicaid coverage to increase access to doulas.**

Many states do not have experience licensing or certifying doulas, or offering a doula benefit through Medicaid. Therefore, significant input from doulas and the families they serve is needed in order to establish a sustainable doula benefit in Medicaid. In particular, states need to ensure the following:

**» Licensure or certification is**

1. Affordable even when training expenses are included.
2. Based on the demonstration of necessary core competencies rather than completion of a particular program.
3. Inclusive of experienced and qualified doulas by providing legacy or experience pathways to qualification in place of trainings or certifications.

**» Reimbursement is**

1. A sufficient rate to enroll enough providers so that everyone who wants a doula has access to a doula.
2. Structured in such a way that moms have access to the full range of full-spectrum doula services that improve health outcomes throughout the perinatal period.

For more information, please contact Ben Anderson, deputy senior director of policy, Families USA, at [banderson@familiesusa.org](mailto:banderson@familiesusa.org).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Families USA supports the interests and experiences of all individuals, including those who identify as transgender or nonbinary, and embraces inclusive language to describe the experience of all pregnant and birthing people. We also recognize that many pregnant and birthing people identify with the terms “woman,” “mother,” “mom” and “maternal” and that embracing more inclusive language does not mean abandoning these terms. Some of the data and research cited in this report also assumes cisgender identity, and the data and research are described using gender labels that cannot be changed without misrepresenting the data.

<sup>2</sup> Donna L. Hoyert, “Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2021,” *Health E-Stats*, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2021/maternal-mortality-rates-2021.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Anderson et al., *Investing in Our Moms: Three Ways State Medicaid Programs Can Improve Maternal Health* (Washington, DC: Families USA, May 2023), [https://familiesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/MCH-2023-28\\_State-Policy-Lever-Paper.pdf](https://familiesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/MCH-2023-28_State-Policy-Lever-Paper.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Anderson et al., *Investing in Our Moms*.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson et al., *Investing in Our Moms*.

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