

“My 9 to 5 Job Is Birth Work”

A Case Study of Two Compensation Approaches for Community Doula Care in San Francisco

Background: With the increased policy emphasis on promoting doula care to advance birth equity in the United States, there is a vital need to identify **sustainable** and **equitable** approaches for compensation of community doulas, who serve clients experiencing the greatest barriers to optimal pregnancy-related outcomes.

Purpose of study: Identify the challenges, benefits, and sustainability of two different compensation approaches used by **SisterWeb**, a community-based doula organization that provides no-cost services to Black, Pacific Islander, and Latina/o/x families in San Francisco.



Characteristics of compensation approaches

Contractor compensation model

(March 2019-June 2020)

- Flat fee per birth (\$1600), split within SisterWeb doula cohorts of 2-3 doulas
- Allowed leaders to onboard doulas quickly
- No health benefits or sick or vacation leave
- Perception that flat fee did not adequately compensate doulas for all activities, including client care and care coordination, training, and administrative work

Benefitted employee compensation model

(As of July 2020)

- Hourly wage (\$25/hour, up to 32 hours/week)
- Healthcare benefit eligibility
- Paid time off, including sick leave
- Consistent, reliable pay
- Required doulas to document their hours
- Still room for wage increase due to cost of living
- Aligned with SisterWeb’s goals of sustainable and dignified employment for community doulas

Key takeaways

- Due to funding restrictions, SisterWeb launched using the contractor compensation model. SisterWeb leaders suspected this model would not be conducive to their goal of providing sustainable, dignified employment for doulas. It did not include health benefits or paid time off, which presented ethical concerns, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Compared to traditional models of doula care, community doulas provide increased services to their clients. Benefitted, hourly compensation models are more sustainable for community doulas than contractor models of compensation.
- Community doula programs need adequate time and funding for program planning in order to avoid costly programmatic changes in the future.
- Despite doula care being endorsed as an intervention to mitigate negative birth outcomes for Black birthing people and other people of color, community doulas in the study had a history of being underpaid and working for free.



Read the full study: Gomez AM, Arteaga S, Arcara J, Cuentos A, Armstead M, Mehra R, Logan RG, Jackson AV, Marshall CJ. “My 9 to 5 Job Is Birth Work”: A Case Study of Two Compensation Approaches for Community Doula Care. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2021; 18(20):10817. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182010817>