

# What is a community doula?

Doulas are trained to provide non-clinical emotional, physical, and informational support to people before, during, and after labor and birth. Some doulas also support people through miscarriages, stillbirths, and abortions. *Community doulas*, or community-based doulas, provide culturally appropriate support to people in communities at risk of poor outcomes, according to the foundational report, “Advancing Justice: Community-Based Doula Models as a Standard of Care for Ending Racial Disparities.”<sup>1</sup>

Being a community doula requires creativity, resourcefulness, and an authentic desire to go above and beyond to ensure birthing people\* get what they need. Learn more about what makes community doulas special. >>



**Community doulas reflect their communities.** They are uniquely familiar with their clients' experiences and recognize their ability to persevere, especially under difficult circumstances. They build kinship with clients and see themselves as family. These relationships can last several months — and sometimes years.

**Community doulas serve populations who are denied a voice in their health care,** including under-resourced communities, Black birthing people, and other people of color. They listen to their clients' concerns and may facilitate communication with providers. Community doulas are uniquely positioned to mitigate the effects of racism and bias in maternity care that drive inequities in maternal health.

**Community doulas fill gaps.** Appointments with health care providers tend to be short. Community doulas help their clients understand the information they receive from clinicians and spend time discussing what questions they still need answered.

**Community doulas are resource-miners and doers.** They connect clients to a range of resources related to food, housing, transportation, health care, including mental health, and more. When their clients' needs fall beyond the scope of their expertise, community doulas make it their job to find answers to questions and facilitate access to resources.

**Community doulas are uniquely collaborative.** They learn from and respect elder birth workers. Community doulas are often embedded in community networks. They rely on their network's knowledge, wisdom, and connections to support their clients.

**Community doulas are trained through multigenerational relationships, lived experience, and/or doula training programs.** Some community doulas work for or with community organizations that provide no or low-cost care to clients. Other community doulas work independently.

**Community doula work is valuable and merits societal investment and dignified compensation.** Although community doulas sometimes provide uncompensated care, this is not sustainable: Community doulas may struggle to make ends meet, take on multiple jobs, and/or experience burnout.

**Some people may not call themselves "community doulas," but they are still doing community doula work.**

“When you add ‘community,’ it’s almost like a self-proclaimed obligation that you show up authentically to support your folks.”

\* We use “birthing people” as an inclusive term to recognize all who give birth, including cisgender women, transgender men, and nonbinary individuals.

1 Ancient Song Doula Services, Village Birth International, and Every Mother Counts. (2019). Advancing Birth Justice: Community-Based Doula Models as a Standard of Care for Ending Racial Disparities.

## ABOUT THE COMMUNITY DOULA RESEARCH PROJECT

Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of California, San Francisco partnered with community doula leaders to create a Steering Committee meant to facilitate equitable and ethical patient-centered research on community doula care. The Steering Committee centers the voices of people of color and consists of community doulas, former doula clients, clinicians, payers, advocates, researchers, and public health professionals who live and work in California, where the project is based.

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