



**Funding to enable Medicaid reimbursement of doula services throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period and to provide support services and technical assistance for the doula population**

**Latest available data puts North Carolina's infant mortality rate at the 11<sup>th</sup> highest in the U.S. and NC rates have been stagnant since 2010.<sup>1</sup>**

**Disparities persist, and in 2023 in North Carolina, Black infants died at rates three times higher than white infants.<sup>2</sup>**

Doulas are commonly defined as nonclinical, trained professionals who can provide emotional, physical, and informational support during pregnancy, delivery, and after childbirth. Doula services are increasingly recognized as an effective way to improve maternal and infant health, enhance birth outcomes and the perinatal experience, and close disparity gaps.<sup>3</sup>

Experts and professional organizations are encouraging increased access to doulas:

- The federal government is supporting efforts to expand the doula workforce and encourage coverage of doula services in several health programs.<sup>4</sup>
- Medicaid and private insurance coverage for doula care services is a March of Dimes policy priority.<sup>5</sup>
- Expanding doula services and the doula workforce are part of the [North Carolina Perinatal Health Strategic Plan](#).
- The number of states that are either actively reimbursing for doula services via Medicaid or are taking steps to do so has increased rapidly; in 2022 there were 21 states and in 2024 there were 43 states.<sup>6</sup>

Significant efforts have been made to study doulas and engage doula stakeholders in North Carolina. In 2023, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services published a [report](#) that provided data on doulas in North Carolina and a report on a doula summit held in in 2022.<sup>7</sup> In 2024, a Doula Action Team was formed to recommend best practices and effective strategies. Through these efforts, a great deal has been learned from North Carolina experts and stakeholders as well as other states that can be utilized to effectively implement doula services within North Carolina's Medicaid system.

NC Medicaid does not currently reimburse for doula services, however some prepaid health plans as part of Medicaid managed care have added doula services as part of their value-added services. Funding estimates for this recommendation include \$1.5 million recurring to implement Medicaid coverage of doula services and \$550,000 nonrecurring for training, promotion, and doula engagement. (Updated estimates pending.)

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*Doula services have been shown to improve maternal and infant health outcomes and close disparity gaps.*

*Expanding the use of doulas in North Carolina can help lower North Carolina's high infant mortality rates and address racial disparities.*

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**The Child Fatality Task Force** recommends policies to prevent child death and support the health and safety of children.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Center for Health Statistics has not yet released infant mortality rankings for 2023; this ranking is based on 2022 data sourced from the NC State Center for Health Statistics and the National Center for Health Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> NCDHHS Division of Public Health, Title V Office analysis of 2023 NC Resident Death Certificate & Live Birth Certificate Data.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Knocke K, Chappel A, Sugar S, De Lew N, Sommers BD. Doula Care and Maternal Health: An Evidence Review. (Issue Brief No. HP-2022-24). Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. December 2022; Sobczak A, Taylor L, Solomon S, Ho J, Kemper S, Phillips B, Jacobson K, Castellano C, Ring A, Castellano B, Jacobs RJ. The Effect of Doulas on Maternal and Birth Outcomes: A Scoping Review. Cureus. 2023 May 24;15(5):e39451. doi: 10.7759/cureus.39451. PMID: 37378162; PMCID: PMC10292163.

<sup>4</sup> Knocke K, Chappel A, Sugar S, De Lew N, Sommers BD. Doula Care and Maternal Health: An Evidence Review. (Issue Brief No. HP-2022-24). Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. December 2022.

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.marchofdimes.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/2023-24%20Policy%20Priorities.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *State Momentum on Medicaid Doula Coverage, Rate Increases*, Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy, Center for Children and Families, <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2024/04/11/state-momentum-on-medicaid-doula-coverage-rate-increases/>

<sup>7</sup> Doulas in North Carolina: A Landscape Analysis and Summit Report, from the NC Department of Health and Human Services Division of Public Health; Women, Infant, and Community Wellness Section. <https://wicws.dph.ncdhhs.gov/docs/WICWS-DoulaReport.pdf>