

Baby Talk: Maternal and Child Health Policy and Community Based Doula Programs



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Maternal & Child Health in the U.S.

- Low income and minority women and children are consistently at risk for poor health, educational, and social outcomes.
- Several programs are funded to address these health disparities, however most focus on ONE facet of families' lives (e.g., WIC, Medicaid).
- Few programs funded by the government service provide a continuum of care to the mother and child.

Community-Based Doula Model

- **Community based** – lay women recruited from the communities being served
- **Relationship based** – founded on a long-term, trusting, nurturing relationship between the doula and the pregnant woman
- **Collaborative** – requires active partnerships of community members, social service providers, health care providers and funders



Community-Based Doula



- Pregnancy and childbirth education
- Early linkage to healthcare and other services
- Encouraging parental attachment
- Labor coaching
- Breastfeeding promotion and counseling
- Parenting education

Chicago Doula Pilot Project

- During the four-year pilot project conducted from 1996 – 2000, doulas provided support to 259 women who gave birth to 267 babies.
- Teen mothers with doula support had:
 - Significantly lower cesarean-section rates
 - Significantly lower epidural rates
 - Significantly higher breastfeeding initiation rates
 - Delay of subsequent pregnancy
 - More positive birth experiences

Project Outcomes Cost Savings

- Cost per participant was reduced due to fewer costly interventions
 - at least \$750 saved through reduced epidural and c-section
- Increased cost-savings due to reduced length of hospital stay
- Over \$500 in cost-savings from breastfeeding vs formula feeding
- Estimates of \$300-\$1400 saved in public health costs from illness averted

Project Outcomes Cost Savings

- Long-term social impact
- Reduced abuse and neglect
- Development of a skilled work force for the future

Outcomes from Replication Sites

Atlanta Community Based Doula Project (2002-05):

- Of the 161 teens who were served in this 3-year period, 138 gave birth. Among these births:
 - 21% were cesareans
 - 58% received epidurals
 - 84% initiated breastfeeding, 66% immediately after delivery
- There were 138 children delivered (2 sets of twins). Among singleton births:
 - Average birth weight was 6 lbs. 4 oz.
 - 16 low birthweight (lbw) babies
 - One very lbw baby
 - One fetal demise
 - No infant deaths

Outcomes from Replication Sites

Albuquerque Doula Project (2001 – 2003):

90 clients gave birth. Among these births:

- 13% were cesareans
- 23% received epidurals
- 2 low birthweight (lbw) babies
- 93% initiated breastfeeding, 81% in the first hour of life
- 80% of mothers who breastfed were still doing so at 8 weeks

Outcomes from Replication Sites

Indiana Doula Project (2007)

- To date there have been 26 births. Among these births:
 - 28% were cesareans
 - 68% received epidurals
 - 96% of clients initiated breastfeeding immediately after delivery
 - 65% of fathers were present at the birth

CHC Advocacy Agenda

- Goal: To establish public funding streams for doula services in the United States
- *Objective 1:* Create appropriations for training and technical assistance by making funds available to states to assist organizations in implementing doula services.

CHC Advocacy Agenda

- *Objective 2:* Develop initiatives and demonstration projects through grants to community-based organizations to cover start-up and salaries.
- *Objective 3:* Provide reimbursement for doula services by allowing Medicaid reimbursement and encouraging private insurance reimbursement.

Data Drives Policy

- Piloting on-line data collection system
- Working with evaluators at various sites to systemize the data collected