



Toolkit for Expanding Doula-Friendly Hospitals

**A Co-Design Guide for Integrating Doulas
into Inclusive, Team-Based Maternity Care**

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How to Use This Doula-Friendly Hospital Toolkit

A doula is a trained birth specialist who offers various culturally sensitive services, which may include ongoing physical, emotional, spiritual, and informational support to clients and their families before, during, and after childbirth. Doulas help their clients prepare for birth, advocate for their wishes, encourage them to take an active role in their pregnancy journey, and assist them with their transition into parenthood. Every birthing person deserves a doula, regardless of financial or social factors.



Community-based doulas across the U.S make integral contributions to safe, respectful birth for all pregnant people, stepping in to fill critical gaps in non-medical care throughout pregnancy, in the hospital, and in their post-partum transition. By focusing on comfort measures, clear communication, culturally-attuned advocacy, and supplementing clinical care, [doulas improve safety, satisfaction, and equity in maternity outcomes](#). A large body of clinical research evidence shows that the continuous one-on-one support doulas provide is associated with a reduction in cesarean

section, vacuum/forceps deliveries, use of pain medication, and postpartum depression, along with many other positive changes. Despite this, doulas face numerous challenges when attending a hospital-based birth and efforts to increase doula integration need to be made.

To help hospitals expand doula access and achieve these benefits, this Doula Friendly Toolkit – to be used in conjunction with the New York City Department of Health (NYC DOH) [Hospital Doula-Friendliness Guidebook](#) – equips maternity teams with evidence, discussion prompts, and adaptable resources. While the Guidebook provides in-depth technical guidance, this Toolkit complements it with practical, user-friendly tools for real-time use. Grounded in evidence and informed by community expertise, the toolkit

highlights the foundational components of a doula-friendly hospital by defining and providing guidance on supporting the four hallmarks of doula friendliness:

1. Staff Knowledge of Doula Support
2. Doulas as a Part of the Birthing Team
3. Increasing Awareness of Doulas Among Patients
4. Doula Policy

By working through the toolkit, your hospital can identify current gaps, draft clear policies, and track impact in order to pave the way toward an inclusive, team-based model where doulas, patients, and clinicians collaborate for the best possible birth experience.

Community doulas:

- Provide non-clinical physical, psychosocial, emotional, spiritual and informational support before, during, and after pregnancy
- Facilitate communication between birthing person and care providers
- Serve members of the community
- Are trained in historical, educational, and cultural content on how race, institutional, and interpersonal bias, and social determinants of health affect communities of color
- Provide extra home visits and early linkage to services and referrals, free or low-cost support, and linguistically appropriate doula support with cultural humility

Source: New York Coalition for Doula Access (NYCDA) Doula Friendliness Subcommittee

Hallmarks of Doula Friendliness

A doula-friendly hospital is one that promotes:

Staff Knowledge Of Doula Support

- Provides ongoing training for all staff (registration, triage, ambulatory team, labor and delivery, and security) on the doula's role in promoting positive maternal and neonatal outcomes
- Emphasizes how doula support fosters a positive birth experience

Doulas As Part Of The Birthing Team

- Encourages the clinical team to share regular updates on labor progress and potential interventions, both verbally and on a whiteboard
- Incorporates doula insights (based on their knowledge of the patient, and expertise in birth support) with patient consent
- Offers physical accommodations as needed (e.g., a chair or a break area if the patient requests time alone)

Increasing Awareness Of Doulas Among Patients

- Educates patients about the benefits of doula support through staff-patient encounters, social media, posters, brochures, and videos in the waiting area
- Establishes a referral system to connect interested patients with community doula organizations

Doula Policy

- Develops, communicates, and implements a clear policy that defines doula access, doula participation in care, and hospital-supported laboring techniques
- Includes a bidirectional reporting system and designates a doula liaison to address emerging issues
- Allows continuous doula presence from triage to recovery, except in cases of compelling medical reason

In the following pages, each hallmark is explored by identifying key areas for change, outlining anticipated outcomes, and noting data sources to evaluate their effectiveness. Sections then provide practical tools to help clinicians, administrators, and community doulas collaborate in designing a doula-friendly process that seamlessly integrates community doula care into routine obstetric practice.

Hallmark 1: Staff Knowledge of Doula Support

Rationale

Enhances understanding of the doula's role and scope, builds respect and fosters collaboration, reduces misunderstandings during patient care, and increases the likelihood of provider referrals to doula care.

Key Areas for Change

- Assess the level of staff knowledge and doula integration using a survey
- Provide mandatory doula integration training modules for all staff (registration, triage, labor and delivery, ambulatory, security)
- Include doula role and scope education in onboarding for new staff
- Host quarterly joint learning sessions with doulas and staff



Anticipated Outcomes

- Increased staff understanding of the doula role and scope
- Positive staff-doula collaboration

Potential Data Sources

Training logs, staff & doula feedback via surveys, knowledge assessments, interviews, and evidence of Tool & Resource integration into policies & procedures.

Tools & Resources

[Doula Integration Assessment for Medical Providers \(Electronic Survey Template\)](#)

[Doula Integration Assessment For Practicing Doulas \(Electronic Survey Template\)](#)

[Grand Rounds Presentation | Building a Bridge Between Healthcare Providers & Doulas \(Template - NYCDA\)](#)

[Principles of Doula Support in the Hospital \(Info Sheet - NYCDA\)](#)

[NYCDA Provider facing resource on doula Medicaid benefit](#)

[March of Dimes Implicit Bias Training](#)

[Project Implicit- Tests for assessing implicit bias across community demographics](#)

Hallmark 2: Doulas as Part of the Birthing Team

Rationale

Encourages seamless team-based care, builds trust between doulas and clinical staff, improves patient experience and outcomes, and ensures coordinated guidance from doulas and medical providers.

Key Areas for Change

- Promote adherence by ensuring that the patient and the carer understand their birthing plan
- Establish regular check-ins with labor staff, including their doula, with patient consent
- Update labor progress on whiteboards visible to the patient, care team, and doula
- Provide basic accommodations for doulas (chairs, access to rest areas, water, etc)



Anticipated Outcomes

- Doulas are integrated into care processes
- Improved communication between doulas, clinical team, and patients
- Increased respect for, and upholding of, patient birth plans.

Potential Data Sources

Chart audits, staff documentation in electronic medical record (EMR), doula reporting, and doula and patient surveys.

Tools & Resources

[Hospital Doula-Friendliness Guidebook \(NYCDOHMH\)](#)

[Doula Integration Assessment for Medical Providers \(Electronic Survey Template\)](#)

[Doula Integration Assessment For Practicing Doulas \(Electronic Survey Template\)](#)

[TeamBirth Model \(Web Resource - Ariadne Labs\)](#)

[Best Practices for Hospital-Doula Relations](#)

Hallmark 3: Increasing Awareness of Doulas Among Patients

Rationale

Increases patient understanding and uptake of doula care, especially among communities historically excluded from this support.

Key Areas for Change

- Develop patient education materials (brochures, posters, videos) about doula care in multiple languages
- Train staff to discuss doulas as a care option during prenatal visits
- Implement a referral pathway to connect patients to local doula organizations



Anticipated Outcomes

- More patients are aware of doula care
- Increased referrals to doula orgs
- Increased access to doulas for patients

Potential Data Sources

Patient intake forms and/or exit surveys; hospital referral logs, community doula partner referral reports.

Tools & Resources

[Hospital Doula-Friendliness Guidebook \(NYCDOHMH\)](#)

[Doula Integration Assessment for Medical Providers \(Electronic Survey Template\)](#)

[Doula Integration Assessment For Practicing Doulas \(Electronic Survey Template\)](#)

[Team Birth Model \(Web Resource - Ariadne Labs\)](#)

Hallmark 4: Doula Policy

Rationale

Clear and inclusive policies provide structure, transparency, and accountability, ensuring doulas are fully integrated and able to support patients effectively.

Key Areas for Change

- Co-create a written doula policy with input from doulas and staff
- Designate a formal doula liaison on staff
- Establish a feedback mechanism for doulas and staff to report barriers or concerns
- Ensure policy supports full doula access (from triage to recovery)



Anticipated Outcomes

- A formal and functioning doula policy is in place
- Continuous doula access is supported
- Issues are addressed via reporting mechanisms

Potential Data Sources

Hospital logs, doula reports; doula liaison records, feedback forms.

Tools & Resources

[Hospital Policy - Doula Presence \(Sample Policy - UMMS\)](#)

[Hospital Policy - Doula Presence \(Sample Policy - Montefiore\)](#)

[Hospital Policy - Doula Presence \(Sample Policy\)](#)

[Doula & Hospital Observation Hours Agreement \(Sample Contract - BWPC\)](#)

[Letter - Advocating for Doula Presence in Hospitals \(Sample - HealthNet\)](#)

[Doula Integration Assessment for Medical Providers \(Electronic Survey Template\)](#)

[Doula Integration Assessment For Practicing Doulas \(Electronic Survey Template\)](#)

Additional Methods to Engage the Hallmarks

Rationale

Each set of additional methods is optional and context-specific. They provide stronger visibility of how to operationalize each hallmark while respecting that every hospital's culture, staffing, and policies will differ. Sites can adopt, adapt, or build upon these examples to enhance engagement without altering the four foundational hallmark areas themselves.

Staff Knowledge of Doula Support

- Develop short animated explainers or simulation videos that demonstrate doula–clinician collaboration during labor
- Host quarterly joint learning sessions where doulas and staff share perspectives and review real scenarios
- Offer unit-based orientation for staff on doula roles and scope, including “Doula 101” micro-modules
- Incorporate scripts or quick reference cards for staff introducing doula services during prenatal visits
- Feature testimonial spotlights from clinicians and patients showing successful doula partnerships

Doulas as a Part of the Birthing Team

- Create a visual flowchart or “Doula Access Protocol in Action” one-pager showing step-by-step integration from admission to discharge
- Use role-play onboarding videos or peer shadowing to strengthen understanding of team roles and communication
- Establish a Doula Welcome Packet with clear check-in instructions, policies, and key contacts
- Pilot an interdisciplinary debrief process that includes doulas to reflect on teamwork and patient experience
- Clarify policy language around access, documentation, and presence during epidurals or cesareans.

Increasing Awareness of Doulas Among Patients

- Launch a text or poster campaign explaining patients' right to doula support, using inclusive imagery and multilingual content
- Produce short, shareable videos that describe what a doula does and how to request one
- Provide brochures or handouts during prenatal appointments outlining doula options and community contacts

- Incorporate doula information into hospital tours, childbirth classes, or patient portals
- Highlight local Medicaid or managed care organization (MCO) pathways to connect patients with certified doulas.

Doula Policy

- Develop a QR-enabled Policy Hub with department-specific “what-to-do” videos, contact info, and downloadable templates
- Offer editable policy templates that hospitals can adapt to their local credentialing or documentation standards
- Include HIPAA consent and release forms that facilitate information sharing between doulas and clinical teams
- Provide referral-pathway diagrams showing how doulas interface with Medicaid and managed-care systems
- Maintain an Integration Feedback Loop—a simple digital form for doulas to share post-birth insights or identify workflow barriers

Closing and Gratitude

This toolkit is the result of the collective efforts and dedication of numerous individuals and teams. Their unwavering enthusiasm and commitment are making an impact on the sector. Together, we are creating something impactful that will hopefully improve the experience of all birthing people. Let this toolkit serve as a beacon of collaboration, innovation, and positive change.

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About Health Leads

With a vision of “health, well-being, and dignity, for every person, in every community,” Health Leads works collaboratively with local and national partners to unearth and address the root causes of some of the most pressing and complex health equity challenges of today. From maternal health and vaccine access, to housing and food security, Health Leads applies its proven approach and nearly 30 years of experience to removing barriers to health and building a future where communities lead the design of the systems and essential resources they need to thrive.

