



Improving Maternal and Infant Care with Doula Support Part 2: Training & Certification

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Meet Ashley...

Ashley Sova is the Founder and President of CLEbaby, a birth and parenting services business that provides birth and postpartum doula services to families across Northeast Ohio. She manages a growing team of eight women. After a traumatizing first birth experience, Ashley hired a doula for her second child. It was a life-altering experience that changed the trajectory of her career as an academic researcher. CLEbaby's mission is for growing families to not just survive those early years, but to thrive. We want to thank Ashley for her expertise and research into doula training and certification and for sharing her hard work with us in this publication.

In our last segment we covered what a doula does, the difference between birth/labor doulas and postpartum doulas, evidence-based benefits to utilizing doula support, and barriers to doula care. Additionally, CDF provided recommendations for optimizing doula support so that growing families in Ohio have an awareness of their options and access to doula care. In this edition, Ashley Sova shares what training and certification options are available to doulas, and take a deep dive with us into HB 142 which allows Medicaid to cover doula care services.

Medicaid Coverage of Doula Care Services

Medicaid Coverage of Doula Services

Statewide Coverage

- Oregon
- Minnesota
- New Jersey

Pilot Project

- New York

HB 142- Medicaid Coverage of Doula Care Services was introduced by Rep. Crawley (D-Columbus) and Rep Brinkman (R-Mt. Lookout). The bill seeks to create a system for reimbursing doula care through Medicaid. The bill would also certify doulas under the Board of Nursing through existing training organizations. During the rules process the nursing board will develop standards and procedures for doula certification including continuing education requirements, training in racial bias, health disparities, and cultural competency, and develop a registry of certified doulas available to the public. The nursing board will set certificate application and renewal fees, as well as create a waiver of those fees for applicants with a family income not exceeding 300% of the federal poverty line. HB 142 also sets up a doula pilot program in the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections as part of the prison nursery program.

Doula Training & Certification

The first step in training as a doula is finding a training organization that fits that doula's goals and personality. There is no shortage of training organizations these days; according to [Doula Match](#), a website that helps connect women with a local doula or doula agency, there are more than 150 doula training organizations nationwide.



When I decided to train as a doula, I wanted a comprehensive education that included in-person training, self-study and reading, a focus on evidence-based care, respect for the medical community, and a focus on non-judgmental support. I felt as though many people still viewed doulas as “hippies” who only support natural birth, or home birthing. While those doulas still exist, there has been a significant shift in the understanding that doulas are for everyone regardless of how they choose to birth, or how their birth evolves over the course of labor. Even those people having medicated hospital births, inductions, scheduled cesarean births – they too

can benefit greatly from doula support.

It was also important to me to train with an organization that was modernizing the role and teaching me not only how to be a doula, but also how to run a growing doula business. I was striving to elevate the field with a high level of professionalism. Fifteen years ago, there were not many doula organizations utilizing professional branding, user-friendly websites, electronic payment and contracts, a social media presence, and other specialized business practices.. Many training organizations are now teaching these aspects of running a doula business. It's extremely important to me that my clients are not only receiving exceptional doula care, but have a professional, streamlined experience.

The two most well-known, mainstream organizations utilized locally for training are [DONA](#) and [ProDoula](#). While many of the CLEbaby doulas are trained through DONA, I chose to certify through ProDoula because I felt they most closely aligned with my values, and their curriculum was comprehensive and inclusive.

Once a doula has completed a ProDoula labor or postpartum training, she then reads and uses other materials to complete her online exam for certification.

While each of the 150+ training organizations are different, many of them are similar in that their training follows a curriculum taught in-person or virtually, and then certification is obtained by additional reading and study, self-reflection, often times evaluation forms, and a final exam.

There are also several trainings that have a more specific or niche focus. [Stillbirthday](#) trains doulas to support families through pregnancy loss, miscarriage, and stillbirth. The [National Black Doulas Association](#) connects Black birthing families with Black doulas nationwide, and offers several training pathways. There are also a few programs nationwide helping doulas to support

ProDoula's Labor Doula Training is a 2-day, 20-hour hands-on training that covers:

- Communication for birth work
- Understanding the birth environment
- Labor and birth
- The stages of labor: Anatomy and support
- Physical support
- Interventions and medication
- Challenging childbirth
- Immediate postpartum support and the newborn
- The client/doula connection
- Doula self-care

incarcerated female inmates at prisons, like the [Alabama Prison Birth Project](#), and the [Minnesota Prison Doula Project](#).

Questions Surrounding Regulating the Profession

Nationwide, Doula work is an unregulated profession. There is no accreditation or licensing requirements for doulas in the United States. There has been a push to begin regulating doulas, and to require certification to obtain reimbursement. While I can see both sides of this issue, on regulating the practice, I do have mixed feelings on regulating the practice. As with anything, the devil is always in the details.

The benefits of doula regulation are outlined in a much-discussed [Slate article](#) by Elissa Strauss. The most salient reason is that birthing women, medical professionals, and insurers could have a greater sense of confidence that the hired doula is competent, evidence-based, and unbiased. There is little doubt that there are standards of practice that should be commonplace, as well as ethical considerations for all involved.

As Ohio begins the journey to recognizing doulas as healthcare professionals and fairly reimbursing the work they do through Medicaid, it is critically important that doulas themselves are involved in the process of creating the system of certification as well as determining the standards and procedures for continuing education. However, many critics say that, while it sounds good in theory, it is a lot more complex in practice. Doulas are not clinical providers, unlike other licensed and regulated health professionals. Further, Black birth professionals and Black women have a traumatic history of regulation, dating back to slavery practices. Moreover, standardizing trainings do not account for the differences in wants and needs in a community.

Doulas improve health outcomes for both mothers and babies, and decrease costs associated with giving birth; while I think we can all agree that increasing access to doula support is important, it is also crucial to get this right for women and for the profession.



Children's Defense Fund-Ohio thanks Ashley Sova from CLEbaby who has shared her story, research, and expertise for this Child Watch Ohio publication. We also thank the funders of the Ohio Finish Line project for their support. For more information, please contact Ashley Sova, hello@clebaby.com or Kelly Vyzral, CDF-Ohio Senior Health Policy Associate at kvyzral@childrensdefense.org.

A ProDoula postpartum training is a 2-day, 20-hour workshop that equips future doulas with practical skills for postpartum and newborn care, as well as entry-level business skills. Topics included are:

- Non-judgmental support
- Communication
- Physical recovery from birth
- Feeding: Breast, bottle, & formula
- Infant care
- Parenting philosophies
- Perinatal mood & anxiety disorders
- The doula interview
- Sibling care & multiples
- Meal preparation
- Light housekeeping & laundry
- Business forms
- Branding & marketing