



Recruiting and Retaining a Doula

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The following are important considerations for communities and health organizations that would like to recruit and retain a doula as a part of their local health program. Please also refer to the accompanying document *What to Consider Before Becoming a Doula*.

1. Funding Considerations

Doula services in BC are not covered as a part of the Medical Services Plan (BC Services Card/ Care Card) or First Nations Health Benefits. Doulas are self-employed and work independently or as a part of a team. The cost for doula services varies. As an estimate, for three to four visits, doulas on average can charge between \$500 to \$800 for their care. Families often pay for these services themselves. **The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres offers the opportunity to apply for funding for expectant Aboriginal families, so they can access doula services.** Some prenatal programs include the support of a doula at no cost.

Adequate funding is needed for the recruitment and retention of a doula as part of community health services, including: training registration fees and textbooks; travel, transportation, parking, and telephone communication; doula awareness and promotion materials and events; and office space and supplies when appropriate. Some of these are ongoing costs.

Organizations considering hiring a doula will also need to determine their approach to compensating the doula for their work. For example, an organization can employ a doula hourly or as a salaried staff member who may have additional roles and responsibilities beyond being a doula (e.g. early childhood development, childcare, or family programming). Or an organization can pay a doula on a case-by-case basis when a family has requested doula services. Some organizations and doulas may agree to compensation in the form of an honorarium; others may prefer to process payment based on invoices from the doula.

2. Work Environment and Infrastructure Considerations

a) Time Commitment and Flexibility

It takes commitment and flexibility to be a doula and to support a doula through training and ongoing practice. An organization and its doula candidate both should become familiar with the training and certification requirements (including study time, practical experience, and administrative paperwork) to ensure that both parties are willing and able to fully participate. Certification is not mandatory to practice as a doula, but having certification from DONA (Doulas of North America) shows that the doula has met a high international standard, which helps ensure

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expectant parents, their families, and their health care providers that the doula will adhere to the highest standards of conduct and ethics. Having DONA certification may sometimes be preferred by women and their families or organizations. It is also increasingly recognized within the health care system. Visit the Doula Training and Certification list on the FNHA website for more information, contact the training and certification organizations to find out exactly what their requirements are, and talk to other trained doulas who have already completed the process to get a sense of what the time commitment, expectations, and limitations are.

In addition, doulas will need to work flexible hours, including daytime hours, evenings, and weekends as necessary, and be available on call 24/7 to support women and their families. Strong consideration should be made to having backup doula support to allow for continuous care in case a regularly employed doula is unavailable.

b) Communication

Ensuring a doula has reliable means of communication, including good cell phone coverage and an adequate number of minutes, is important to ensure timely and quality care for families. For expectant women and their families who do not have a cell phone, a doula or host organization could consider providing them with a temporary one while they receive doula services.

c) Travel

Ensuring a doula is able to travel to help women and their families in other communities is also important. A doula should have a driver's licence and access to a reliable vehicle or adequate public transportation to be able to meet clients when and where it is convenient for them.

3. Doula Awareness

It is important for an organization's leadership to be invested and committed to supporting doula efforts. An organization and its doula will need to build and maintain meaningful relationships within and across communities in order to increase awareness about doula services and reach potential clients. This is not a one-time activity but rather an ongoing aspect of doula work - an organization and a doula both need to be willing and prepared to do this promotional work. Ideas for how to build awareness about the role and benefits of a doula within a community or organization are suggested below.

a) Information Materials

An organization and doula should have promotional material on hand, including:

- A flyer or handout (see Doula Resources on FNHA website for a sample) describing what a doula is, the benefits women and families will experience when they have a doula, and the referral process; and/or
- Business cards or postcards (see Doula Resources on FNHA website for a sample) to hand out to potential clients and community organizations.

b) Promotional Activities

Below is a list of suggested activities that an organization or doula could do to increase awareness of doula services:



Friendship centres, health centres, child and family centres, early childhood development programs, and child care programs can spread the word about doula services and act as safe locations for doulas to meet with clients.

- Present at band meetings, hub meetings, and community meetings.
- Distribute flyers in friendship centres and band offices.
- Place ads in band newsletters.
- Submit articles in newsletters of First Nations/Aboriginal organizations.
- Host an information session/table at prenatal classes and parenting sessions.
- Host an information table at health or career fairs.
- Submit articles in local newspaper, do interviews with radio/TV.
- Attend Pow Wows, Potlatches, and other culture events.
- Present at Elders Gathering and Elders lunches.
- Time promotion work around Aboriginal Mother's Day.
- Present at school parent/teacher association meetings.
- Put posters up in nursing stations, public health clinics, health centres, hospitals, child and family service centres, local churches, stores, and other retail outlets if available.
- Connect with local health care providers, such as community workers, nurses, midwives, and physicians.
- Connect with a local First Nations/Aboriginal navigator or liaison if there is one in the area.
- Host events with early childhood development, child care, and maternal health programs.
- Provide business cards to professionals providing home/family support to women and families, such as home support workers, health nurses, Aboriginal Infant Development consultants as they may know of women that could benefit from these services.
- Help host or involve yourself in community activities such as Welcoming Babies Ceremonies or Naming Ceremonies.

c) Engage the Community

The more individuals an organization can connect a doula with, the more support and referrals a doula is likely to receive. Organizations such as friendship centres, band offices, hubs, local health centres, and schools are essential for raising awareness and gaining support for doulas and doula services. Friendship centres, health centres, child and family centres, early childhood development programs, and child care programs can spread the word about doula services and act as safe locations for doulas to meet with clients.

Involve community groups and local businesses when organizing awareness events—ask them to sponsor or co-host events. Invite Elders to be involved by providing opening and closing prayers, reflections, guidance, encouragement and sharing knowledge and stories about maternity care practice.

Some important community partners a doula should work with include:

- Maternal and child health services
- Community health and social services
- Public health units, community health nurses, and home support workers



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- Local midwives, physicians, and maternity nurses
- Friendship centres
- Elders
- Medical students

d) Collaborate with Health Care Providers

It is important for a doula to establish credibility with local health care providers, so they can understand, appreciate, and work collaboratively with doulas to improve outcomes for mothers and babies. Health care providers can also talk to women about whether a doula is right for them and help refer them to a doula for support. An organization can help their doula set up meetings with partners at community health centres, public health units, and acute care facilities to establish these relationships.

4. Evaluation

Evaluation is an important component of supporting quality doula service provision. It can help ensure services are useful and relevant to expectant women and their families. Evaluation also provides the opportunity to identify successes and lessons learned to improve care and share helpful learning with partners.

Ongoing evaluation of doula services is helpful throughout development and delivery. Evaluation results can capture steps taken and challenges faced during service provision. An organization can assist a doula in implementing a feedback mechanism with women and their families receiving services (e.g. a short questionnaire with five questions).

A doula should also track and monitor specific data, such as:

- number of women and their families who received doula services
- number of births attended
- number of women who initiated breast-feeding
- number of women who continued breastfeeding beyond six weeks, six months, and one year

A more comprehensive evaluation can include broad stakeholders (e.g. doulas, healthcare providers, Elders, community partners, etc.) through surveys, verbal check-ins, or formal focus groups as examples. Sharing the results with everyone who participated is an important way to maintain engagement and increase ownership for doula services.

Final Note

In summary, a community-based organization can play a significant role in supporting the recruitment and integration of a doula within existing maternal and child health services. Funding, infrastructure, awareness building, and evaluation considerations are all essential in ensuring that a doula is able to practice in a sustainable way that best meets the needs of women and their families.

These considerations are based on evaluation results from the Tripartite Aboriginal Doula Initiative, a pilot project which was conducted in the Vancouver Island and Interior regions and involved First Nations and Aboriginal women learners in the area.

