



PA PERINATAL ACTION COLLABORATIVE

Doula's Role in Supporting Equity and Removing Disparities in Perinatal Care

Presented by CocoLife Foundation | Maternal Outcomes Matter

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About CocoLife Foundation

CocoLife is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit advancing maternal health equity for Black moms, birthing people, and families through education, advocacy, community support, and workforce development.

“We promote a community-empowered and healed model of care.”

 Pregnancy, postpartum & compassion (loss) support

 Doula workforce development & sustainability

 Tackling Social Determinants of Health

Key Service Areas*

- Philadelphia
- Chester County
- Bucks County
- Delaware County
- Montgomery County

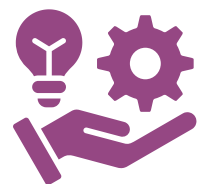
Educate. Empower. Elevate.

Every family deserves equitable, compassionate care before, during, and after birth.

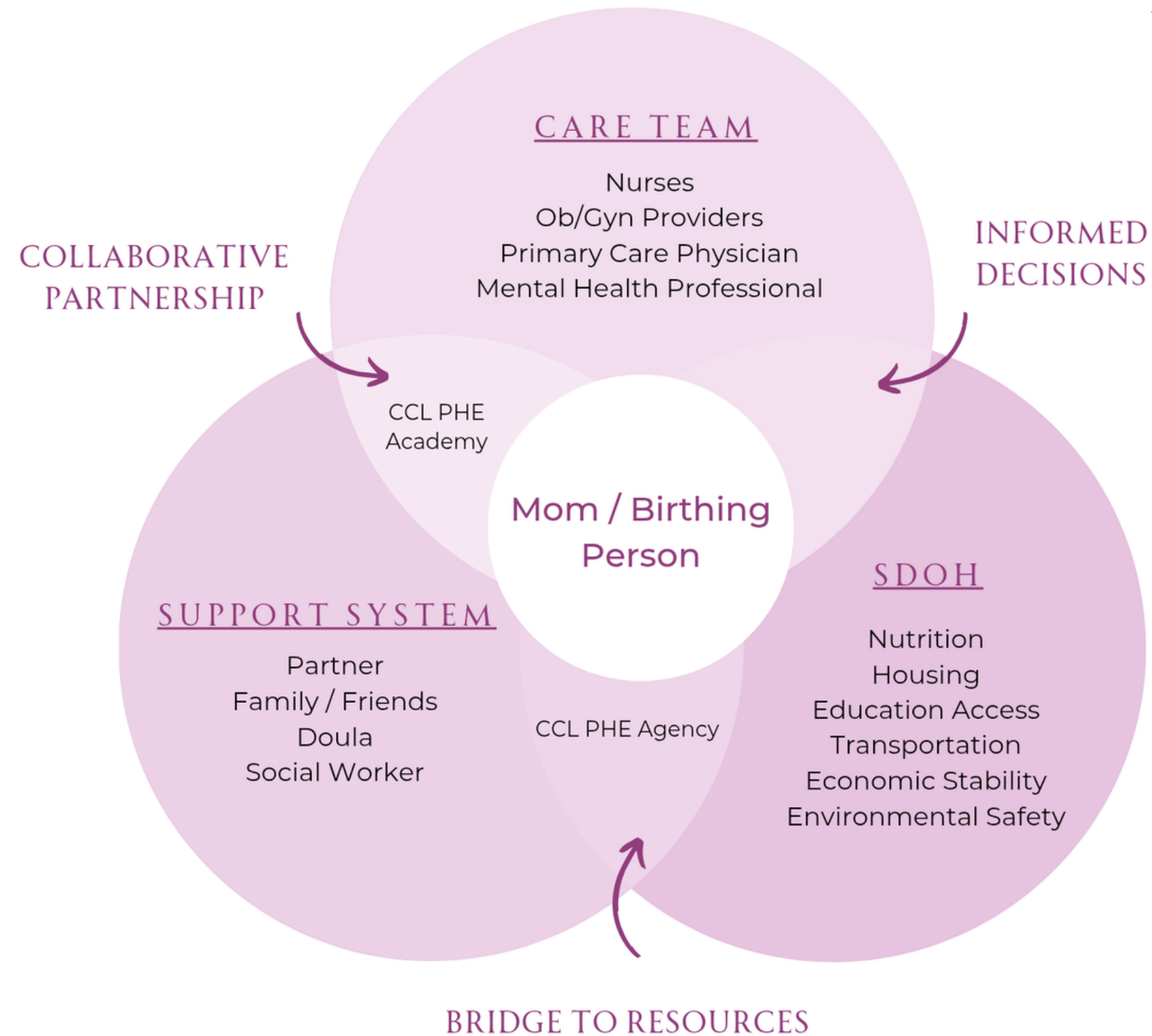
*CocoLife’s footprint is national with strong service areas in The DMV, NY, NJ, DE, GA & TX

MOM/BIRTHING PERSON CENTERED MODEL OF CARE

We surround moms and birthing people with the care, resources, and partnerships they need to thrive.



Our approach is collaborative, compassionate, and community-driven – because every mom deserves support, dignity, and choice.



Session Objectives



Understand the Landscape

Ground the conversation in the current state of maternal health outcomes and the racial disparities driving them.



Clarify the Doula's Role

Define how doulas support families across the perinatal continuum — and how that support functions as an equity intervention.



Identify Barriers & Solutions

Examine the systemic, financial, and cultural barriers limiting access to doula care — and what's working to remove them.



Define a Path Forward

Leave with concrete, actionable recommendations for the PA Perinatal Action Collaborative.

The Landscape

The Current State of Maternal Health

2025 March of Dimes Report Card

For the fourth consecutive year, the U.S. earned a D+ for preterm birth — the longest stretch of the lowest grade in Report Card history.

D+

U.S. grade for
preterm birth
(4th year running)

1 in 10

U.S. births
born preterm
in 2024

~380,000

babies born
preterm
nationally in 2024

Source: March of Dimes, 2025 Report Card on Maternal & Infant Health

Disparities Are Not Evenly Distributed

Black women and birthing people bear a disproportionate share of the U.S. maternal health crisis — a gap that has persisted for decades across income and education levels.

~3x

higher risk of pregnancy-related death for Black women compared to White women, across income and education levels

CDC, Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System

2x

higher rate of preterm birth and low birthweight for Black birthing people compared to White birthing people

March of Dimes / CDC

Most

pregnancy-related deaths are considered preventable with timely, respectful, coordinated care

CDC Maternal Mortality Review Committees

This is why the “Bridging Gaps” approach matters: closing this gap requires culturally responsive, community-rooted models of care — not just more of the same care delivered faster.

Clarifying The Doula's Role

WHAT IS A DOULA

A doula is a trained, non-clinical professional who provides emotional, physical, and informational support to individuals and families throughout the perinatal period: pregnancy, birth, and postpartum.

Doulas work alongside — not in place of — healthcare providers, centering the well-being, confidence, and informed decision-making of the birthing person and their family.

The word “doula” comes from a Greek term meaning “woman’s servant,” but today doulas can be of any gender and serve families of all backgrounds.



Reflection: As you begin this journey, take a moment to reflect on your own birth story or what you’ve heard about it—and consider how supportive care can shape the birth experience.

Types of Doulas:

- Birth
- Postpartum
- Lay midwives
- Abortion
- Bereavement
- NICU
- Justice
- Sister & Community
- Adoption or Surrogacy
- Doulo

The SCOPE of a Doula:

- Support
- Compassionate Companion
- Organize
- Prepare
- Educate



Support Across the Perinatal Continuum



Pregnancy

- Prepares for labor & informed decisions
- Teaches comfort measures
- Bridges communication with medical team



Labor & Birth

- Continuous presence when staff must rotate
- Hands-on comfort & advocacy support
- Supports partners and loved ones



Postpartum

- Newborn feeding & soothing support
- Screens for emotional wellness
- Supports recovery, sleep & adjustment



Fertility & Loss

- Support through TTC, IVF, IUI
- Guidance during early pregnancy uncertainty
- Compassionate grief & loss support

Why Doulas Matter: The Data

39%

reduction in cesarean birth

15%

increase in spontaneous vaginal birth

38%

decrease in low Apgar score risk

Source: Cochrane Review, Continuous Support for Women During Childbirth



Postpartum Emotional Health

- Lower rates of postpartum depression and anxiety
- Increased confidence, bonding, and breastfeeding success
- Reduced isolation, improved coping in the first 6 weeks



Supporting Families Across the Journey

- Fertility doula support reduces stress and improves coping
- Postpartum doula care linked to better sleep, healing & lower stress

Doulas as an Equity Intervention

For Black birthing people specifically, doula support does more than improve comfort — it functions as a direct counterweight to systemic bias in maternity care.



Buffers bias & racism

Helps buffer the effects of racism and implicit bias within clinical encounters.



Improves communication

Strengthens communication and trust between families and clinicians.



Culturally aligned care

Offers emotional support that reflects families' language, values, and lived experience.



Earlier warning detection

Supports earlier identification of complications and warning signs.

Identify Barriers and Solutions

Barriers to Support & Access



System & Policy

- Fragmented postpartum care; weak continuity after discharge
- Insurance & reimbursement gaps limit sustainable doula access, especially for Medicaid families



Social Determinants

- Unmet needs: housing instability, food insecurity, transportation, childcare
- Financial strain limits engagement with available support



Trust, Culture & Communication

- Mistreatment & poor communication undermine trust and reduce help-seeking
- Cultural incongruence & stigma leave needs unmet without responsive care

Observed in PA implementation: geographic & logistical constraints (travel time, limited local referral partners); workforce sustainability pressures requiring ongoing mentorship and supervision to prevent burnout.

CocoLife in Action Across Pennsylvania



SEPA Postpartum Transitions Program

Wraparound postpartum support for Chester, Bucks, Delaware & Montgomery Counties: community doulas, mental health support, care navigation, and education.



HOPE+ Postpartum Screening Tool

100% of enrolled families screened for mental health & SDOH risk within 5 days, administered by trained community-based doulas, aligned with PA DOH metrics.



Perinatal Health Academy

Community doula training, an 8-week Doula Development Hub, and interprofessional workshops connecting doulas and clinicians — including a new high school pathway in Philadelphia.

2025 IMPACT SNAPSHOT

153

doulas trained

168

babies welcomed nationally (89 in the Philly area)

75

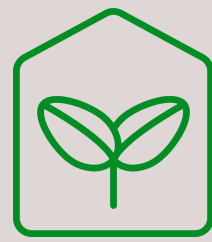
moms supported through the Hospital of the University of PA Doula Care Pilot

60+

moms in monthly support groups

Source: 2025 CocoLife.black Impact Report

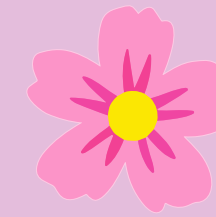
WAYS WE SUPPORT



Prenatal Support Group

For expectant birthing people seeking community, education, and encouragement during pregnancy

- Share experiences and ask questions
- Prepare for labor and delivery
- Available in English and Spanish



Postpartum Support Group

Designed for those who have given birth within the past 24 months.

- Guidance, resources, and peer connection
- Focus on recovery, bonding, and support
- Available in English and Spanish



Mental Health Mommy Meetup Support Group

For birthing people raising at least one child under 5 years old.

- Connection and parenting strategies
- Emotional support
- Facilitated by a licensed mental health professional



Compassion Support Group

A nurturing space for individuals who have experienced pregnancy or infant loss

- Compassionate support
- Healing resources
- Honoring your journey

SUPPORT GROUPS

All of our support groups are designed to meet where you are—with compassion, connection, and care.



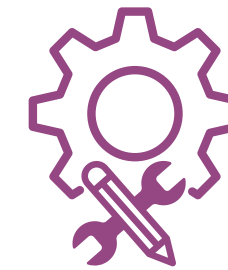
Hosted Virtually

All groups are held online to ensure comfort, privacy, and accessibility.



Available in English & Spanish

We offer bilingual support to serve our community with inclusion and respect.



Facilitated by Trained Professionals

Our groups are led by doulas and licensed professionals who are here to support you.

Learn more at www.cocolife.black

POSTPARTUM TRANSITIONS PROGRAM

Funded by The PA Department of Health

53% of pregnancy-related deaths occur 7 to 365 days postpartum ([NCSL](#)). Participants receive support during the early postpartum months to help them safely transition from clinical care to community-based, long-term wellness support. The program addresses key Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), including access to healthcare, mental health services, food security, housing stability, and social support.



A core component of the program is trusted relationship-building between postpartum parents and trained CocoLife doulas, who offer emotional support, education, advocacy, and system navigation. Families are also connected to mental health professionals when needed and to trusted community resources that support healing, stability, and recovery.

THE POSTPARTUM TRANSITIONS PROGRAM PRIORITIZES:

- 1 Reducing postpartum complications and maternal morbidity
- 2 Improving maternal mental health outcomes
- 3 Increasing engagement & access to postpartum tools & care essentials
- 4 Strengthening family support systems
- 5 Creating sustainable pathways to community-based care

Through this model, CocoLife advances **maternal health equity** by ensuring postpartum parents are not left unsupported after birth and by strengthening the continuum of care between healthcare systems and community-based organizations.

THE PARENT HUB

Funded by The William Penn Foundation

The Parent Hub is a welcoming space for parents and caregivers to access support, education, and essential resources – all in one place.



SUPPORT. Connect with other parents and build a stronger community.



EDUCATION. Join workshops and sessions on topics that matter most.



COMMUNITY. Build meaningful connections and lasting support.



RESOURCES. Receive essential items and helpful tools for your family.



June 2026 Parent Hub graduates celebrating program completion in Philadelphia

Define A Path
Forward

WHY INVEST IN POSTPARTUM CARE?

Evidence shows that high-quality postpartum care **saves lives**, **strengthens families**, and **reduces costs**.

1

IT SAVES LIVES
by Preventing Maternal Mortality and Severe Complications



More than half of pregnancy-related deaths occur after birth, and many happen after hospital discharge. Most are preventable with timely follow-up, education, and coordinated care.

Postpartum care helps:

- ✓ Identify postpartum hypertension before it becomes life-threatening
- ✓ Detect and treat complications from hemorrhage
- ✓ Identify infections earlier
- ✓ Screen for cardiovascular disease, a leading cause of maternal mortality
- ✓ Improve follow-up after emergency department visits

KEY EVIDENCE

- More than 50% of pregnancy-related deaths occur between 7 days and 1 year postpartum.
- The CDC estimates that over 80% of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable with appropriate systems of care.

2

IT IMPROVES MENTAL HEALTH
and Early Childhood Development



1 in 5 mothers experiences a perinatal mood or anxiety disorder, yet many go undiagnosed. Untreated postpartum depression affects not only the parent but also infant attachment, breastfeeding, child development, and family functioning.

High-quality postpartum support is associated with:

- ✓ Lower rates of postpartum depression and anxiety
- ✓ Increased breastfeeding initiation and duration
- ✓ Improved parent-infant bonding
- ✓ Better infant cognitive, emotional, and social development
- ✓ Reduced family stress

KEY EVIDENCE

- Perinatal mental health conditions are among the leading causes of maternal mortality in the first year postpartum.
- Early intervention produces measurable improvements in maternal well-being and child developmental outcomes.

3

IT REDUCES HEALTHCARE COSTS
Through Prevention



Investing in postpartum care is financially sound because preventing complications costs far less than treating emergencies.

Comprehensive postpartum services can reduce:

- ✓ Emergency department utilization
- ✓ Hospital readmissions
- ✓ NICU admissions through improved infant care
- ✓ Complications from uncontrolled chronic conditions
- ✓ Long-term healthcare costs associated with untreated mental health conditions

KEY EVIDENCE

- Studies show that doula support is associated with lower cesarean birth rates, fewer preterm births, and improved breastfeeding outcomes—all of which reduce healthcare spending.
- Medicaid programs and health systems increasingly reimburse postpartum support because preventing complications is more cost-effective than treating them after they occur.



LIVES SAVED

Comprehensive postpartum care prevents complications and saves lives.



FAMILIES STRENGTHENED

Better maternal health leads to stronger families and brighter futures for children.



COSTS REDUCED

Prevention today leads to lower healthcare costs and healthier communities tomorrow.



HOW DOULAS HELP during postpartum

Doulas provide physical, emotional, and informational support that improves outcomes for parents and babies.



Emotional Support

Offer compassionate support, reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety, and promote maternal confidence.



Breastfeeding & Infant Feeding Support

Provide hands-on help and guidance to increase breastfeeding success and duration.



Navigating Recovery

Help parents understand normal recovery, manage discomfort, and recognize warning signs that need medical attention.



Practical Help

Support with newborn care, meals, rest, and household tasks so families can heal and adjust.



Connection to Resources

Link families to community resources, mental health support, and ongoing care when needed.



Research shows that doula support is associated with better health outcomes, higher satisfaction, and lower costs.



INVESTING IN POSTPARTUM CARE IS AN INVESTMENT IN A HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR ALL.

www.cocolife.black

WHAT THIS COLLABORATIVE CAN DO

A Call to Action



Integrate doulas into formal care pathways

Embed doulas as recognized members of the perinatal care team, not an optional add-on.



Fund postpartum continuity

Sustain financing for community-based doula support beyond the delivery room, through the full postpartum period.



Build closed-loop referral systems

Connect families, clinicians, and community resources with real hand-offs and follow-up — not one-way referrals.



Include doulas on advisory boards

Ensure doulas have a seat at the table where perinatal policy and funding decisions are made.



Thank You

Questions & Discussion

support@cocolife.black | www.cocolife.black

We support moms — bump & beyond.

cocolife.black

non-profit 501(c)(3)

Cocolife.black is a platform designed to support Black Moms in 3 key maternal stages, pregnancy, postpartum and compassion (for the loss of a child or significant loved one).

We are on a mission to drastically improve maternal outcomes through our Mombassador Movement. Nationally, we are building a network of trusted community partners, medical professionals, faith-based organizations, and others who believe in health equity.



WHO WE SERVE AND HOW:



Black moms (dads): gifts, doula & mental health support groups, birth/parenting workshops, and access to essential resource partners.



Doulas (birth workers): business support, professional development, and scholarships for certification and continuing education.



Community: Coco Connect virtual shows, edutainment events and recognition.



*We unapologetically promote a community-empowered model of care!
Join us as we support moms bump & beyond!*

Questions? support@cocolife.black



Become a Doula,
Learn about Services &
Join the Community

