

# HOW CAN DOULAS HELP ADDRESS RACIAL DISPARITIES IN CARE?\*

The rates of maternal mortality in the United States are at crisis levels. Black pregnant and postpartum people are three to four times more likely than non-Latinx white pregnant and postpartum people to die from complications of pregnancy and birth. Black infants are also more than twice as likely to be born prematurely or to die within their first year of life than non-Latinx white infants. These racial disparities persist across socioeconomic status, age, and education.

The United States also lags behind its peers in the overall delivery of maternal care. [One national survey](#) found that one in six women reported mistreatment during childbirth, including being shouted at or scolded by a health care provider, being ignored, and having their requests for help refused. Women of color, women giving birth in hospitals as opposed to giving birth at home, and women with lower socioeconomic status, experienced mistreatment more frequently. [Another survey in California](#) found that higher numbers of Black women and Asian and Pacific Islander women, reported unfair treatment, harsh language, and rough handling during their hospital stay, as compared to white women. [Surveys of Black women in the San Francisco Bay Area](#) reveal that they feel disrespected and coerced by their health care providers, and as a result are often fearful of institutionalized maternal health care systems.

One piece of the solution to help address these racial disparities in care is to expand access to full spectrum doula care. Doulas can provide individually tailored, culturally congruent care and advocacy for pregnant and postpartum people through information, education, and physical, social, and emotional support. While doulas cannot eliminate individual and institutional racism in the medical system, doulas can help improve the maternal health experience and address health disparities by reducing the impacts of racism and racial bias on pregnant and postpartum people of color. Doulas who understand the physical, social, and emotional impacts of racism can provide much-needed support to their clients, and above all act as their advocates as their clients navigate medical systems of care.



ALL PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM PEOPLE DESERVE ACCESS TO FULL SPECTRUM DOULA CARE.

\* This fact sheet uses the term “women.” This is not intended to be exclusionary. We recognize that different categories of people, including cisgender women and transgender men, are able to become pregnant, and we use the term “women” here in order to conform to the cited research.

*Supported by the California Health Care Foundation (CHCF), which works to ensure that people have access to the care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford. Visit [www.chcf.org](http://www.chcf.org) to learn more.*



This is fact sheet #2 in a series of three fact sheets about Medi-Cal coverage for doula care. Read our full report at <https://healthlaw.org/resource/doulareport>.