

TIMELINE OF BIRTH WORK IN THE U.S. AND CALIFORNIA



Half of all children born in the United States are delivered with the help of a midwife attendant. Granny Midwives, typically Black women in the south, assist in countless births from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. Immigrant midwives from Europe, Mexico, and Japan practice birth work in other parts of the country.

New York City opens the first municipally-sponsored American midwifery school, called Bellevue Hospital School for Midwives. Births attended by Bellevue-trained midwives have lower maternal and infant mortality rates than the city-wide average.

Prominent obstetrician Dr. Joseph DeLee speaks out against midwives at the American Association for the Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality annual meeting, spreading the falsehood that midwives cannot safely care for pregnant women.

Midwife-attended births drop to less than 15% of all births.

Modern day concept of the “doula” emerges from the natural birth movement’s desire low low-intervention, unmedicated births. The term is first used by Dr. Dana Raphael, a breastfeeding advocate who derives the term from the modern Greek term for “servant-woman.”

Direct entry midwives develop out of feminist efforts to reclaim bodily and birth autonomy.

Doulas of North America, now DONA International, is founded, becoming one of the first organizations to train and certify doulas.

Oregon’s Medicaid program begins providing coverage for doula care. Minnesota follows two years later.

States across the country begin introducing bills relating to Medicaid coverage for doula care. In 2019, Indiana and New Jersey pass bills providing Medicaid coverage for doula services, while Washington passes a budget item.

Midwifery is legal but unregulated in the state

Midwifery becomes an official independent profession due to an amendment to AB 1375, California’s Medical Practices Act, which creates a new category for state-certified midwives.

At the request of the California Medical Board and medical lobby, SB 966 dismantles the midwifery licensing program and effectively makes midwifery illegal.

Nurse-midwifery law passes in California that requires Certified Nurse Midwives to practice under the supervision of an obstetrician.

One of the first professional organization for doulas in the state, the National Association of Childbirth Assistants, is founded in San Jose by Claudia Lowe.

AB 1308, the Licensed Midwifery Practice Act, passes after over a decade of advocacy, facilitating access to home births by Licensed Midwives.

San Francisco General Hospital starts one of the state’s early volunteer doula programs, to provide support to birthing women and their families

Assemblymember Eloise Gómez Reyes introduces California Assembly Bill 2258, which proposes to create doula pilot program for Medicaid enrollees in 14 California counties with the highest rate of birth disparities.