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## Community Doula Resources in Vermont

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# Community Doula Care & Resources in Vermont

Grace Merritt, MS3

Family Medicine Clerkship February-March 2023  
UVMHC Family Medicine - South Burlington (Mentor: Dr. David Reisman)



# Identification of Need

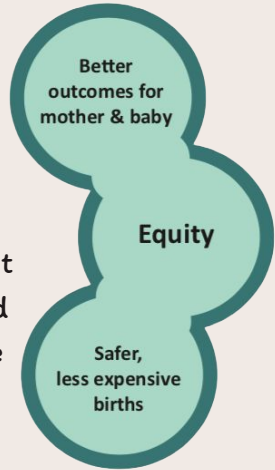
## What is a doula?

- Doulas are “trained professionals who provide continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to clients before, during, and shortly after childbirth,” according to DONA International, America’s largest doula-certifying organization [13].

## Why are doulas important?

- Modern hospital care practices have reduced the availability of hospital staff to remain with a mother during labor. A result of this has been the loss of having someone at the bedside to offer continuous support throughout the birthing process [5].
- The positive effects of doula care have been found to be greater for women who were socially disadvantaged, low income, unmarried, primiparous, giving birth in a hospital without a companion, or had experienced language/cultural barriers [5].

# Public Health Cost



## The benefits of doula care are supported by consistent, high-quality research.

Cochrane systematic reviews have reported the positive effects of continuous labor support since 1995. In 2017, the most recent review analyzed data from 26 individual studies involving more than 15,000 women. The review found numerous benefits to continuous labor support and no known harms of such care, including: [2].

- **39%** reduction in the likelihood of cesarean births
- **15%** greater likelihood of a spontaneous vaginal birth
- **10%** reduction in the use of pain medications
- **Shorter** labor by an average of 41 minutes
- **31%** reduction in reporting a negative birth experience

- Subgroup analysis found most benefits and greatest effects sizes when continuous support was provided by someone in a doula role (versus a member of the hospital staff or the woman's social network) [2].
- Reduced interventions and reduced complications can lead to better birth outcomes and significant cost savings. The average cost of a c-section can be more than \$9000 greater on average than a vaginal delivery [9].
- Doulas can be particularly beneficial for women of color and women from low-income and underserved communities and can help reduce health disparities by ensuring that pregnant people who face the greatest risks have the added support they need [2].



# Community Perspective

Dr. David Reisman, MD, who is one of the obstetrics providers at UVMHC Family Medicine - South Burlington, has seen increased patient interest in doula support. Dr. Reisman noted that although many patients have benefitted from the volunteer doula service at the hospital, other patients are interested in and would be better served by more continuous support throughout pregnancy, labor & delivery, and the postpartum period. It would be helpful for the providers to learn more about doula care within the local community so that they can share resources and recommendations with patients.

"A doula can be an integral part of your care team by helping to facilitate a birth that is motivated by authenticity, empowerment, and confidence," -Mary Kate Shanahan, Vermont Doula Company Co-Founder, Labor & Postpartum Doula, Perinatal Educator

"Our VDC Doula was integral to the magical experience we had at the birth of our child. She used different comfort techniques and effectively supported both my husband and me throughout labor and delivery. They were so patient with us and provided us with extensive education in addition to their support in advance of our birth." - Gwen Pokalo (former VDC client)

# Intervention & Methodology

Community Project Goal: Learn more about doula care within the community and assemble a resource for providers and patients.

The doula resources in Burlington mainly involve the UVM medical center doula service, a selection of doula groups and companies, and solo doula services.

I met with Mary Kate Shanahan, who is one of the co-founders and owners of Vermont Doula Company (VDC), to learn about her perspective and knowledge of doula care. I also learned more about her company as well as other community doula and prenatal resources

- When people are interested in doula care at VDC or simply curious about doula care in general, the process begins with an intake call with one of the company owners. After this, people may take the next steps towards getting paired with a doula at VDC, or Mary Kate can help provide the best option for that person, whether that be working with a different doula in the community or utilizing the free volunteer doula program at the hospital.
- Other features of VDC include classes and education groups, overnight support, postpartum support, and sibling support

# Results

The following is an Epic dot phrase for providers and/or patients regarding community doula resources in Burlington. It is meant to be shared with the OB providers at the South Burlington clinic and anyone else who is interested. It is also meant to be edited or updated as needed.

## Doula Information & Community Resources

### What is a doula?

- Doulas are trained professionals who provide continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to clients before, during, and shortly after childbirth,<sup>1</sup> according to DONA International, America's largest doula-certifying organization.

### What is NOT included in doula support?

- Doulas are not medical professionals, and the following tasks are not performed by doulas:
  - o They do not perform clinical tasks such as vaginal exams or fetal heart monitoring
  - o They do not give medical advice or diagnose conditions
  - o They do not make decisions for the client (medical or otherwise)
  - o They do not take over the role of the partner
  - o They do not change shifts (although some doulas may call in their back-up after 12-24 hours)

### What are the benefits of doulas?

- The benefits of doula care are supported by consistent, high-quality research. Cochrane systematic reviews have reported the positive effects of continuous labor support since 1995. In 2017, the most recent review analyzed data from 26 individual studies involving more than 15,000 women. The review found numerous benefits to continuous labor support and no known harms of such care, including:
  - o 39% reduction in the likelihood of cesarean births
  - o 15% greater likelihood of a spontaneous vaginal birth
  - o 10% reduction in the use of pain medications
  - o Shorter labor by an average of 41 minutes
  - o 31% reduction in reporting a negative birth experience

### What is the cost and accessibility of doula services?

- In general, the cost of doula services varies by region, but often ranges from \$750 to \$2,000 per pregnancy. This, at the very least, includes a prenatal visit, delivery, and post-delivery follow-up. Many doula companies offer additional services and packages.
- Most insurance companies do not include doula services in their coverage, however, Health Spending Accounts (HSAs) and Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) can be used to pay for doulas. Additionally, those who have Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont who enroll in the Better Beginnings Program have the option of the "Help at Home" reward, which the Vermont Doula Company postpartum support qualifies for.
- The doula services at the UVM medical center are provided by trained volunteers and are free of charge for laboring patients (however, their services are first-come, first-served, so are not guaranteed).
- Vermont Doula Company tries to make doula care accessible to all people, and some doula companies offer sliding scale payment options (example: VT birth journeys).

## Local Doula Resources

[Doula Services \(vwmhealth.org\)](#) – free doula services at the UVM medical center

[Vermont Doula Company](#) – prenatal, birth, and postpartum doula support, education & groups

[Vermont Birth Journeys \(vbirthjourneys.com\)](#) – doula services, childbirth education classes, prenatal and postnatal massage

[Grow Prenatal + Family Yoga Center - Burlington, Vermont \(growfamilyvt.com\)](#) - prenatal, postnatal and children's yoga classes, doula support, and childbirth education

The above list is not exhaustive – there are numerous other group and solo doula practices within Vermont.

## Other Community Resources (provided by VDC)

### IBCLC - Lactation Support

[Breastfeeding \(uvmhealth.org\)](#)  
Home L. Blomgren (blomgren.vt) – Alice Norris  
Courtney Walker-Borch 802-869-1895  
Chelsea Clark 802-363-3297  
Kristen Bird 802-922-2568

### Prenatal Massage [Message Journey](#) - Gene

### Acupuncture

[Jeanette Moy](#)  
Integrative Acupuncture - Williston  
Julie Cormier Suarez

### Physical Therapy (Prenatal, Pelvic Floor)

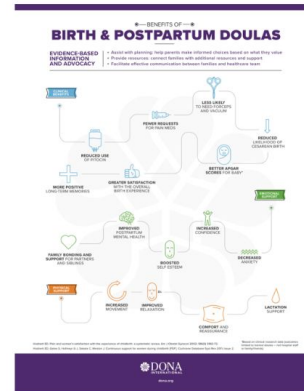
Pelvic Health  
Phoenix Physical Therapy  
Caldwain VT  
New Moon Physical Therapy (does in-home care. Does not take insurance)

### Nutrition

**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** - works with gestational diabetes

### Chiropractic

[Mati Rushford](#) – Only prenatal & infants  
[Laura Ramirez](#)



To learn more about doula care, check out the following resources:

<https://evidencedbasedbirth.com/the-evidence-for-doulas/>

<https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/benefits-of-a-doula/>

# Limitations & Evaluation of Effectiveness

## Limitations & Considerations

- Project wise, due to time constraints, the utility of my intervention could not be fully assessed.
- On a broader scope, doula care can be costly and is rarely covered by insurance.
  - Although VDC and other community organizations try hard to make doula care accessible to all people, not everyone who wants a doula will be able to afford or access one.
  - Because doulas are not seen as medical professionals and therefore not “essential care,” most insurance companies do not include them in their coverage. Although not covered by most health insurance providers, most Health Spending Accounts (HSAs) and Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) can be used on paying for doulas.
  - Medicaid also covers the use of doulas in 15 states (not in VT currently), and organizations like the Doula Medicaid Project are fighting to help Medicaid coverage cover doulas in more states throughout the country [10].

## Evaluation of Effectiveness

- Follow up with providers once their patients have used doula services to see how satisfied they were with their care; would they recommend care to others?
- Follow up with providers to understand if the dot phrase was used and follow up with patients to understand how useful the information was to them.
- Continue to update the dot phrase as needed with relevant and current information.



# Recommendations for Future Interventions

- Continue promoting use of doulas and continue the conversation about the value of support for women before, during, and after labor. Increased awareness regarding benefits of doula care will hopefully increase the likelihood of insurance coverage as well.
- Acknowledge and explore the *consequences of inadequate social support during the perinatal period*, such as perinatal mood and anxiety disorders.
  - While many women experience some mild mood changes during or after the birth of a child, 15 to 20% of women experience more significant symptoms of depression or anxiety [8].
  - One study estimated PMADs to cost \$14 billion for the 2017 birth cohort from conception to 5 years postpartum. The largest costs were attributable to reduced economic productivity among affected mothers, more preterm births, and increases in other maternal health expenditures [1].
  - Doulas are uniquely positioned to support women before and during birth and in the postpartum period and can serve as a great asset to identify symptoms of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) and refer women to treatment.
  - Studies have shown that women who received doula care showed lower odds of postpartum depression or anxiety, relative to women with similar sociodemographic and clinical characteristics but with no doula care [7].

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- [9] Hurst, Andrew. “The Cost of a C-Section Is More than \$9,000 Greater on Average than a Vaginal Delivery.” ValuePenguin, ValuePenguin, 8 Dec. 2021, <https://www.valuepenguin.com/cost-of-vaginal-births-vs-c-sections>.
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- [14] Vermont Doula Company, <https://vermontdoulacompany.com/>

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[Home | Blooming Babies VT](#) – Alice Norms  
Courtney Walker-Borch: 802-999-1695  
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#### Prenatal Massage

[Massage Journey](#) - Genie

#### Acupuncture

[Jeanette Moy](#)  
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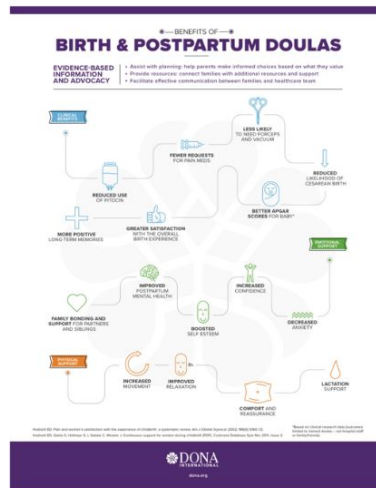
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