What is a Doula?

The term *doula* is defined as:...a Greek word meaning a woman who serves. In labour support terminology, *doula* refers to a specially trained birth companion (not a friend or loved one) who provides labour support. She performs no clinical tasks. *Doulas* also refers to laywomen who are trained or experienced in providing postpartum care (mother and newborn care, breastfeeding support and advice, cooking, child care, errands, and light cleaning) for the new family. To distinguish between the two types of *doulas*, the term *birth doula* and *postpartum doula* are used.7

### benefits of uninterrupted labour support vs births without continuous support

Scott et al. (1999) analyzed 12 clinical studies and found that there was a: 51% reduction in cesarean births

25% reduction in labour length (average of 98 minutes)

32% reduction in analgesia

71% reduction in oxytocin augmentation

57% reduction in use of forceps/vacuum.8

What is the difference between a midwife and a Doula?

*Doulas* do not provide medical care, and do not deliver babies. Midwives are trained to provide all necessary medical care and ensure the health and well-being of the mother and baby. *Doulas* work as a part of the team, with a midwife or doctor and nurse, and are a positive addition to the birth team for those couples who desire extra support.2

What do *doula* services cost?

Currently *doula* services can range between $250–$800.00 per childbirth, although some clinics have provided similar services to clients within First Nations communities in Canada. Across Canada, many First Nations communities and organizations are finding new ways of incorporating doula training and care in their communities.6

How Can I become a *doula*?

Contact one of the national associations to discuss the trainingellow to you. Once you have become a certified doula you may register with a *Doula Association*. Culturally specific doula training for First Nations is being developed in several provinces across Canada, including British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec.6

### doula support has SIX MAIN FUNCTIONS

These are to:

- Recognize birth as a key life experience.
- Nurture and protect a women’s memory of birth.
- Maintain an uninterrupted presence during labour and birth.
- Recognize the effects of emotions on the physiology of labour.
- Provide comfort techniques and encourage positions that promote progress during labour.
- Promote early breastfeeding and bonding.9

For First Nations families, *doulas* have the potential to make positive contributions to situations where women are birthing away from their home communities. They can act as communicators and advocates for the birthing family, and can facilitate incorporating traditional practices into the birthchild process, if the family desires this.10

Traditionally, women supporting women during childbirth has been an important part of the birthchilding process. It is described as an ancient and widespread practice, and that “one of the most profound changes in the birthchild process during the 20th century was to isolate the women from her social supportive network.”10

For First Nations families, this impact is often greater, especially in remote regions where women are required to leave their home communities to give birth. Although there has been no research about doula specific care for First Nations people in Canada, there have been numerous studies illustrating that continuous social support during labour has positive impacts on not only labour and delivery, but also on breastfeeding rates and attachment.10

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2. Pascali-Bonaro, Debra. *NAMING DOULAS: Women Turtle women chose to be called “American Indian.” 4 Likewise, in a First knowledge that comes from being creation.” The project stresses that Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, the doula term. At the American Indian Family community was trained as a well-respected grandmother of the meaning “she who helps the mother.”6

5. Midwives Association of British Columbia web site [www.bcmidwives.com/questions].
10. Six MAIN FUNCTIONS

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