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UAMS Study Finds More Doulas Needed in Arkansas

FAYETTEVILLE — Community-based doulas can help mothers better navigate the health care system and provide cultural support, but there are not enough doulas in Arkansas to serve communities, according to researchers from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

Doulas are trained birth coaches who provide continuous emotional support, advocate for and aid informed decision-making during labor and delivery, assist with breastfeeding initiation and support, promote positive maternal mental health, and advocate for culturally sensitive care within health care systems.

Doulas who participated in the [UAMS study](#) about their experiences assisting immigrant and refugee mothers expressed the need for more community-based doulas to serve more clients and provide relief for the current doulas who are being overworked.

“We need more doulas,” said one participant. “We really tire out the ones we have. I want to give my client 100%, but if I’ve just done a 26-hour birth and then go right into another 29-hour birth, I don’t feel that I can give them 100% even if I have done everything I possibly could. At some point, I do need to sleep.”

Currently, Arkansas has fewer than 50 trained doulas in the state. Arkansas is one of nine states in the country that does not offer doula certification.

“Doulas serve not only as a bridge to social services and health care navigation but also as cultural support by making sure moms feel safe and included during visits and procedures with their maternal health care providers,” said Britni Ayers, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the UAMS College of Nursing. “All of the doulas in the study were very passionate about their work, but they did express an overwhelming need for more community-based doulas.”

The use of a doula can lead to improved birth outcomes for both mothers and infants and has been shown to lead to reduced cesarean births, improved birth weights, increased breastfeeding rates, lower rates of postpartum anxiety and depression, and more.

“I wish everyone understood the impact a doula can have because they not only provide the support a mother needs when she is in labor, but they also empower women by advocating for their wishes and rights in the delivery room,” said Mary Victor, a nurse educator at the UAMS Institute for Community Health Innovation. “If more people understood the power of a doula, there could be more opportunities to support and expand the current doula workforce in Arkansas.”

The UAMS Institute for Community Health Innovation is working with the Arkansas Doula Alliance, Ujima Maternity Network, Excel by Eight Foundation, the Arkansas Chapter of American Pediatrics and hospitals statewide to train more doulas in Arkansas and to establish a doula association. To learn more about the institute’s mission to improve maternal health outcomes, visit communityhealth.uams.edu.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and eight institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute, Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and the Institute for Community Health Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,485 students, 915 medical residents and fellows, and seven dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 11,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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