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**UAMS Enrolls 25 Doula Trainees
from 14 Arkansas Counties in Latest Class**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Institute for Community Health Innovation will train at least 25 doulas in 2026 after enrolling its latest class of trainees in January.

The institute launched its comprehensive doula training program in 2025 in partnership with Ujima Maternity Network and Birthing Beyond, enrolling more than 50 participants across 28 counties. Trainees are required to attend classes with both Ujima and Birthing Beyond, receive 45 hours of Certified Breastfeeding Counselor training, attend multiple live births and receive hands-on mentorship.

“Together, we’ve not only expanded the doula workforce through training and certification, we’ve expanded what’s possible for maternal health in Arkansas,” said Nicolle Fletcher, co-founder of Ujima Maternity Network. “This partnership shows how systems change and families thrive. By honoring community tradition alongside institutional structure, we’re building a model that will continue improving the lives of Arkansans.”

Doulas are trained birth coaches who provide continuous emotional and physical support throughout labor and delivery. Research shows that incorporating doula support into maternal care significantly improves birth outcomes, including lower rates of interventions like cesarean sections and preterm births, while enhancing maternal satisfaction, infant health and parental engagement. Additionally, doula-assisted care is linked to reduced maternal and infant mortality and decreased postpartum depression.

“Doulas have the ability to fill crucial gaps for mothers in their pregnancy journey, especially in rural areas where access to care might be limited,” said Rosalinda Medrano, assistant director of community programs at the institute. “By training individuals to serve our mothers in Arkansas, we aren’t just investing in new jobs or career paths — we’re investing in the long-term health of communities across Arkansas.”

The newest class of 25 trainees started their program in January, representing 14 counties across the state: Benton, Crittenden, Cross, Faulkner, Garland, Hot Spring, Izard, Jefferson, Mississippi, Polk, Pulaski, Saline, Van Buren and Washington. Five of those counties — Crittenden, Cross, Faulkner, Polk, and Van Buren — are newly represented by trainees this year.

More training courses are expected to launch later this year. Interested parties should email doula@uams.edu for more information on the program and how to enroll.

“To improve Arkansas’ maternal health outcomes, we have to think of innovative solutions that expand beyond the major metropolitan areas of the state,” Medrano said. “I’m inspired to see that more than half of Arkansas’ counties are now represented by individuals committed to creating a better state of health in their communities.”

The training of the January cohort is supported through a \$125,000 award from the Arkansas Office of Skills Development. The Office of Skills Development (OSD), an office within the Division of Arkansas Workforce Connections in the Department of Commerce, strategically invests in all levels of the Arkansas workforce by raising education and skill levels, meeting the needs of companies operating in Arkansas, and balancing workforce and employer interests, leading to greater economic achievement for workers and companies.

The award from OSD joins funding the agency provided to the institute to train new community health workers (CHWs) across the state. Through that award, 75 additional CHWs will be trained this year.

The institute’s Doula Expansion Initiative is part of UAMS’ strategy to improve maternal and child health outcomes across Arkansas. The institute also offers group prenatal care, case management, care coordination and other services in select regions of the state. To learn more about the institute’s services, 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 3,553 students and 902 medical residents and fellows. It is the state’s largest public employer with about 12,000 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](#).