

Benefits Division

Department of Health Care Services

Via email: DoulaBenefit@dhcs.ca.gov

To Department of Health Care Services (DHCS),

As members of the DHCS Doula Stakeholder Workgroup, community based doulas, concerned Californians and many others we want to send this letter to formally state our issues with the current DHCS process for creating the Medi-Cal Doula Benefit.

From the very beginning, this process has been fraught with issues of communication and transparency. Members from DHCS and the Workgroup felt unseen, not understood, and not appreciated for their expertise and skill set. In response to these concerns, DHCS created a codesign group to facilitate communication and to move the work forward. Unfortunately, that codesign group has not been utilized properly and their advice has been consistently ignored. DHCS requested and received direct advice about the creation of the doula benefit only to ignore, not respond, or state that the information needed 'to be taken back'. The result was the dwindling of the remaining trust with the stakeholder group.

Despite misgivings and concerns, the DHCS Doula Stakeholder Workgroup remained invested in the process in the following ways ::

- Hosting meetings between updates from DHCS to build consensus and community buy in to the doula benefit,
- Research additional states and Medicaid Doula Benefits,
- Met with representatives from New Jersey, Rhode Island, Oregon, and Florida to collect lessons learned in implementing a doula benefit,
- Starting an email group to keep all Stakeholders and Community Members informed,
- Joining a codesign group at the request of DHCS,
- Attending multiple small group and informal meetings with DHCS,
- Repeatedly expressing a desire for increased transparency and collaboration,
- Asking for a timeline and expectations from DHCS,
- Providing feedback on the draft State Plan Amendment (SPA), and
- [Co-creating a coalition letter](#) to provide comments and suggestions on the draft SPA that was signed by over 30 Stakeholder groups.

All in, this group has spent hundreds of hours in the process of co-creating the Medi-Cal Doula Benefit. DHCS has publicly expressed their desire to work with the Medi-Cal Doula Workgroup and has hired Deitre Epps, Race For Equity, to moderate the meetings in an attempt to move this work forward in a cohesive, collaborative manner.

Unfortunately, during the meeting on Thursday, April 28th it became apparent that all of this work was for naught, as DHCS has planned to move ahead with a SPA that DOES NOT include the recommendations of the Doula Stakeholder Workgroup and the families, communities, and organizations they represent. The issues listed below are of critical importance and threaten to derail what was already a tenuous process.

- DHCS has repeatedly refused to respond to the Doula Stakeholder Workgroup's suggestions including but not limited to: those voiced during calls, comments expressed in the chat, documents submitted to DHCS with suggestions for the doula program, and the letter highlighting concerns that was co-signed by over 30 Community Organizations.
- At the last meeting, it was inferred that the SPA will be submitted to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) without further consultation or consideration from the Doula Stakeholder Workgroup. These suggestions were requested by DHCS and yet have not been fully presented in the meetings nor have they been addressed in codesign group meetings.
- Requests to extend the timeline in order to fully evaluate the SPA were ignored and no answer was provided by DHCS.
- DHCS presented suggestions that are contrary to those provided by the Doula Stakeholder Workgroup. The source and collection method of these 'stakeholder' suggestions were not revealed.
- There has been no response from the letter that was submitted by 30 stakeholder groups.
- The Governor's 'May Revise' Budget is set to be released on **May 14th** while DHCS has scheduled a meeting to discuss reimbursement and the process on **May 16th**.

The immediate ask of the Doula Stakeholder Workgroup is ::

That DHCS DOES NOT SUBMIT the State Plan Amendment for the Medi-Cal Doula benefit until a full discussion of all points of concern are fully discussed in the Doula Stakeholder Workgroup meetings.

We are fully aware that this will cause a delay in the effective date of the benefit (currently set for January 1, 2023). We firmly believe that a well designed benefit is the goal and this means that more time, effort, communication and collaboration need to occur. We know that other states, the Federal Government, doulas across the United States, and expectant families are watching this process. Our hope is by making a direct and public request, we can course correct this process and bring us all back to the table to create the strongest doula benefit for those that need it most - the birthing people of California.

This letter deserves a response by **May 5th** with an in person meeting to discuss concerns scheduled by **May 10th**.

We eagerly await your response,

Organizations

AAIMM Doula Program	Every Mother Counts
Alofa Mai Pacific Birth Services	Frontline Doulas
Beauty for Ashes Maternal Wellness Inc.	Her Health First
Birth Companions C.C	LA Best Babies Network
Birthworkers of Color Collective	LLMC
Black Mother's United	MightyLittleGiants
Black Women Birthing Justice BLACK Wellness & Prosperity Center	Mothers for Mothers Postpartum Justice
BreastfeedLA	Oakland Better Birth Foundation
Casa Doula Training Center	Postpartum Healing Lodge
CA Black Health Network	Sankofa Birthworkers Collective of the Inland Empire
Desert Wombs In Bloom	SisterWeb Community Doula Network
Diversity Uplifts, Inc.	Soul Blossom, LLC
Doula Jinny	Speaking of Birth
Doulas Association of Southern California	Universal Doula Care
Doulas Care Latin American Association	VBAC Facts
Doulas Telar Org	Yvonne McCombs

Individuals

Adjoa Jones	Deidre Coutsoumpos	Kathleen Rojas	Michelle Sanders	Shannon Cath
Alexis Perryman	Dr. Jhilya Mayas	Keylla Bobino	Mika Cade	Shannon Shaw Pace
Ana Delgado	Dr. Sayida Peprah	Khefri Riley	Mikaela Lynn	Sierra Massey
Arisa Palmer	Elizabeth Simmons	Laia	Nakeisha Robinson	Stevie Merino
Ashton Hasson	Iyanna Newborn	Leona Spivey	Nicole houston	Tamara Walton
Brandi Desjolais	Jana Wright	Leslie Greene	Precious Jackson	Teresa Green
Carmen Stramara	Jen Kamel	Linda Jones	Priscilla Enniful	Tina Roberts
Cathleen Colby	JesSeLa Wehner	Lucy Roberts	Raeanne Lee Madison	Verónica fregoso
CC Oronoz	Jessica Wade	Marna Armstead	Rebecca A Lindhorst-Ballast	Yuki Davis
Channa Walz	Jessie Ray Spivey	Lucy Roberts	Renett Clough	Yvonne McCombs
Chantel Runnels	Jill Wodnick	Marna Armstead	Rhonda M. Smith	Zarriah Banks
Christian Beckley	Jinny Pagle	Martha P Franco	Ruta Lauleva Aiono	
Coral Smith	Julia Larson	Melanie Corrales	Ruta Lauleva Aiono	
Dannhe Maya Herrera	Kairis Chiaji	Melissa Mullins	Shana Spinks	
Davina Williams	Karen I East	Mercedez Johnson	Shanee Finley	