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# LA County Seeks to Expand Doula Services for Women on Medi-Cal and Low-Income Families

By Virginia Gaglianone



When the Duke and Duchess of Sussex — formerly known as Prince Harry and Meghan Markle —

announced the pregnancy and subsequent birth of their first child, they publicly disclosed that they would be engaging the services of a “doula” to support the expectant mother.

The concept of a trained support person assisting mothers through childbirth is far from new, and its numerous benefits have been well documented by research and medical professionals alike. And yet, until now, this benefit has remained out of reach for many.

This week, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a motion, introduced by Supervisor Hilda Solis and co-authored by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, directing county departments to identify funding sources to expand doula services for pregnant women enrolled in Medi-Cal, incarcerated women, and high-risk pregnant individuals who do not qualify for Medi-Cal coverage.

“Access to high-quality healthcare should not depend on a woman’s income or socioeconomic status,” stated Supervisor Solis. “Every mother and child, regardless of race or ethnicity, has a fundamental human right to quality medical care.”

### **Doulas, Midwives, and Other Allies**

A doula is a professionally trained individual who provides guidance, information, emotional support, and physical comfort to a mother before, during, and immediately after childbirth. Doulas have existed since time immemorial. The word itself derives from ancient Greek, originally meaning “servant” — in those times, enslaved women attended to their mistresses throughout pregnancy. In the United States, the term gained prominence during the 1960s, born from the growing preference among women for natural, unmedicated birth.

“A doula is the woman who supports the mother on a psychological, emotional, and educational level,” explained Veronica Hinojosa-Stang, a doula with 19 years of experience and a specialist in postpartum services and newborn care.

Today, the term “doula” extends well beyond maternal care and is also used to describe trained professionals who assist patients recovering from surgery, among other applications.

### **The Benefits of Doula Support**

“Children don’t come with an instruction manual. Part of a doula’s work is to inform and educate the mother so she knows what to expect. It is equally important to involve fathers, so



Figure 1: \*  
Veronica Hinojosa-Stang

they can help and know how to respond when the mother is coping with pain,” noted the expert.

The support of doulas significantly reduces the likelihood that mothers will require medication during labor. Doula-assisted care also lowers infant mortality rates, particularly among African American women and their babies.

“It is well documented that African Americans face disproportionately high rates of infant and maternal mortality across the country, including in Los Angeles County,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “I believe that increasing the number of certified, high-quality doulas and making their services affordable for those who need them most will lead to a reduction in these unnecessary and preventable deaths.”

According to a 2018 report by the California Department of Public Health, more than 41% of pregnancy-related maternal deaths are preventable.

Multiple reports concur that doulas play a pivotal role in increasing the number of healthy infant births, especially among immigrant women with limited access to quality healthcare. Studies have demonstrated that women who received doula support during labor were significantly less likely to undergo a cesarean section, thereby reducing the risk of maternal mortality.

### **Doulas and Latinas**

“We Latina women are incredibly strong. Society forces us to be strong — we’re like the Pachamama, we believe we can do it all,” reflected Hinojosa, an immigrant from Peru. “Many Latinas living in the United States carry that same belief. Many have husbands who don’t help. For them, having a doula’s support would be a luxury. That’s precisely why this motion to cover services for low-income women is so important.”

The doula offered the example of postpartum depression.

“After giving birth, the vagina, the nipples — everything hurts. New mothers can’t sleep, and many even have to deal with husbands who expect to be attended to. It’s a perfect recipe for depression. But when mothers know what to expect, when the doula guides and counsels them on breastfeeding, provides massage to ease the pain, or cares for the baby so the mother can rest — among many other things — they don’t become depressed. Every mother, regardless of her financial situation, benefits



Figure 2: \*  
Father supported by a doula

from this support.”

Hinojosa is a single mother with a bachelor’s degree in education, and it was her passion for babies that led her to pursue this career. She currently offers “Advance Baby Care and Doula Services” training, where she shares practical tools and techniques for maternal care. The next training session begins in March.

### **In Search of Funding**

The motion approved this week directs the Department of Public Health, alongside other county departments, to produce a 90-day report outlining the funding streams that could be used to expand doula services for middle-income women of color, incarcerated women, and women who do not qualify for Medi-Cal coverage.

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*This is an English translation of the original article published in La Opinión.*

**Read the original article (Spanish):**

<https://laopinion.com/2020/01/30/el-condado-de-la-busca-expandir-servicio-para-mujeres/>

*Nest and rest, while she takes care of the rest,  
You deserve the best!*

**Veronica Hinojosa-Stang**

Baby Nurse & Doula Services

veronicahinojosa.com

Veronicayourdoula@gmail.com