



The Collaborative for Equity and Justice

# BUILDING YOUR PERINATAL CARE TEAM



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# INTRODUCTION

This e-book was explicitly created with Black mamas and birthing people in mind. It is meant to spread awareness of the many professionals available to support pregnancy, infertility, loss, abortion, and the postpartum period. We created this e-book to provide clear, colorful, and helpful information about the care providers that are available throughout a birth journey. The information shared in this e-book will discuss what each professional is, how they can help, and how to find this person locally. We also intend for providers to use this e-book to make referrals and build relationships with other maternal healthcare professionals nearby. We hope this kind of education, awareness, and outreach will be helpful for communities long term.

We know that the prenatal, pregnancy and postpartum periods are often life-changing experiences for mamas, birthing people, and their families. We hope that mamas, birthing people, and the communities supporting them will feel more informed about the support options they deserve by utilizing this resource. We understand the sensitivity and importance of who is hired to work with individuals and families during a health journey. We encourage everyone to locate, support, create, and hire care teams that will honor the humanity and uniqueness of these experiences—even if switching providers along the way becomes necessary. Ultimately, we hope that this resource helps people become more informed about support options for pregnant people and their families.

# ABOUT RH IMPACT

**Mission:** In collaboration with communities, we challenge systemic inequities to achieve reproductive health equity. Through Black women-led scholarship, we apply research & evaluation to policy advocacy, capacity-building, and power-shifting strategies. We center Black women's lived experiences, scholarship, and activism.

**Vision:** Creating a world where Black communities can achieve our full potential for reproductive health, wellbeing, safety, and joy.

To learn more about our organization, find us online at [www.rhimpact.org](http://www.rhimpact.org).

## A Note on Language in Our Work

At RH Impact, we believe that everyone deserves an optimal birth experience. This includes mamas and birthing people. Throughout this project, we have chosen to use the term “birthing people” to refer to individuals who have the capacity to or have experienced pregnancy or childbirth.

This distinction in language can have many reasons, including but not limited to persons not identifying as cisgender females, pregnant people that seek abortion care services, or pregnant due to surrogacy. Nevertheless, we believe in supporting all persons who give birth or experience pregnancy. Using this gender-neutral term allows us to be inclusive of all gender identities and sexual orientations in our work.

Obstetrician/  
Gynecologists

Maternal-  
Fetal Medicine  
Specialists

Labor and  
Delivery Nurses

Childbirth  
Educators

Mental Health  
Professionals

Pelvic Floor  
Therapists

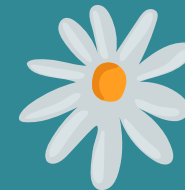
Anesthesiologists

Pediatricians

Midwives

Doulas

Lactation  
Professionals



# THE CARE TEAM

# OBSTETRICIAN- GYNECOLOGISTS



**O**bstetricians are doctors that care for mamas and birthing people before, during, and after their pregnancy. Gynecologists are doctors that provide routine care for non-pregnant people with female reproductive health systems. The title Obstetrician/Gynecologist, or “OB/GYN,” is for doctors with both roles.

Gynecologists perform regular screenings like vaginal exams or pap smears to ensure that the vagina, cervix, uterus, and other parts of the reproductive system are healthy.

Before mamas and birthing people become pregnant, an obstetrician can conduct prenatal screenings that include questions about one’s previous pregnancies, family history, and other factors that can impact a new pregnancy. These screenings can provide helpful clues for what to look for during pregnancy. Some

OB/GYNs also perform abortions. An obstetrician can help ensure that a baby is growing at a normal rate and monitor the baby’s position in preparation for birth. Obstetricians and the staff that they work with conduct ultrasounds to show pictures of the baby as they grow and offer postpartum care after delivery.

Mamas and birthing people who select an OB/GYN should speak with them about birth options and planning as their pregnancy progresses. They should also ask questions about what to expect if the baby is born prematurely and will need support in a hospital’s NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit). Guidance from an OB/GYN about what additional support in the NICU could look like can help families and loved ones feel prepared in case it becomes necessary.

## How to Access Care

OB/GYNs work in hospitals, birthing centers, and private medical centers. Some kinds of health insurance require a referral from a primary care physician (PCP) before seeing an OB/GYN, but many insurance providers—including those that accept Medicaid—do not. Asking community members for recommendations is another good way to find an OB/GYN.

# MIDWIVES



**M**idwives are healthcare providers who specialize in prenatal care, pregnancy, postpartum care, and newborn well-being. Some midwives also offer well-woman care, a holistic approach to physical exams focusing on reproductive health.

There are different kinds of midwives in the United States:

➤ **Certified Professional Midwives** are midwives that have met the certification requirements of the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM). They provide ongoing care throughout pregnancy, hands-on care during labor, birth, and the immediate postpartum period, and maternal and well-baby care through the 6-8 week postpartum period. They also conduct initial and ongoing comprehensive assessments, diagnoses, and treatments.

➤ **Licensed Midwives** are medical professionals who provide

hands-on support for mamas and birthing people throughout the labor process. They have completed a graduate-level midwifery degree program and passed a certification exam from the American Midwifery Certification Board.

➤ **Certified Nurse Midwives** are registered nurses with additional training in pregnancy and childbirth. They also have a Master's degree in nurse-midwifery. CNMs are common in healthcare spaces and are certified by the American Midwifery Certification Board.

The care that midwives provide often differs between states. Some birthing centers offer both OB/GYNs and midwives to mamas and birthing people to expand the variety of options for their birth team. Generally, midwives catch babies in birthing centers, homes, and hospitals. Many midwives are experts in supporting unmedicated births.

## How to Access Care

Midwives can be found online through organizations like The National Black Midwives Alliance, The American College of Nurse-Midwives, and The National Association of Certified Professional Midwives. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram or the suggestions of family and friends are also great ways to find midwives.



# DOULAS



**D**oulas are non-medically trained professionals that support mamas and birthing people informationally, physically, and emotionally to help them feel prepared and informed about pregnancy, birthing, and parenthood. Having a doula present as part of a pregnancy care team can also provide advocacy and support that pregnancy, abortion, labor, birth, and the postpartum period can require. Should mamas and birthing people choose to hire a doula, they can also speak with them about developing a birth plan, preparing for the unexpected, and creating a postpartum plan.

Some doulas help families adjust to life with a new baby after birth or a surrogate experience. Other doulas help families grieve and process complicated emotions if a baby passes away. There are also doulas specializing in traditional postpartum care, helping LGBTQIA+ people, birthing people, and families, or assisting those needing abortion care.

Because of the intimate relationship established with mamas and birthing people in advance, doulas are often equipped to check in with healthcare staff at a birthing center or hospital to ensure that their client's needs and desires are heard and respected.

## How to Access Care

Doulas can be found through word of mouth, social media such as Facebook groups, or searching online for local doulas. Medical insurance providers can also confirm if doula support is covered under existing coverage or seek out financial aid resources based on city and state-run programs on a patient's behalf. Several organizations and individuals create directories for doulas local to their communities.

# CHILDBIRTH EDUCATORS



Childbirth educators teach mamas, birthing people, and their families about what they can expect throughout each pregnancy so that they are equipped with important, personalized information. They can share insight about available birthing options so patients can choose what works best for them.

These professionals offer workshops and learning sessions that help mamas, birthing people, and their families feel informed and empowered about what labor and postpartum care will entail. While childbirth educators don't play an active role in the birthing process, they share information about best care practices while pregnant and give specific postpartum advice for each mama and birthing person.

## How to Access Care

Many community-based organizations, birthing centers, and community centers offer courses taught by childbirth educators where families and partners are welcome to participate. Mamas, birthing people, and their loved ones can also connect with local birth workers to find resources and do a Google, Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok search to find what places and people offer classes and support.



# LACTATION PROFESSIONALS



**L**actation professionals help with feeding infants and children. There are different types of trained professionals, including Internationally Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC), Certified Lactation Consultants (CLC), and Certified Lactation Educators (CLE).

Lactation professionals can address many feeding concerns depending on their training, expertise, and work experience. These could include help with latch techniques, tongue ties, pumping and storing milk, formula feeding, and transitioning to solids.

Questions about pumping and storing milk safely and issues including sore nipples, difficulty helping a baby latch successfully, and trouble establishing a stable milk supply are all specialty areas for lactation professionals. They may also notice oral ties that can make latching difficult for babies and refer clients to the proper professional for support. By working to solve these and other issues, these specialists can help alleviate the stress or anxiety that mamas, birthing people, surrogate parents, and even experienced parents may experience around ensuring that a baby is being fed properly.

Nurses, midwives, and obstetricians may provide lactation assistance—especially after birth. But board-certified lactation professionals can offer a more in-depth perspective because of their specific training.

## How to Access Care

Lactation professionals work in birthing centers and hospitals. They can work independently and take on private clients in homes if desired. Black mamas and birthing people can find networks supporting their desire to learn better feeding techniques through social media networks like Facebook, community-based organizations, WIC offices, or word of mouth from family, friends, and neighbors.

# PELVIC FLOOR THERAPISTS



**P**elvic floor therapists are medical professionals who support people experiencing pain or discomfort along their pelvic floor. The pelvic floor is a dynamic, basket-shaped muscle group at the bottom of the pelvis made of tissues and pelvic floor muscles. These muscles are used for many bodily functions, including going to the bathroom, exercising, having sex, or having a baby. The pelvic floor also supports bladder control, gut health, and reproductive organs.

For pregnancy or postpartum care, pelvic floor therapists can teach different stretches and techniques to help mamas and birthing people balance their pelvic muscles and ensure they are prepared for a significant event like giving birth. They also share information about pushing techniques, labor, birthing positions, and stretches to reduce the likelihood of getting hurt during delivery. A pelvic floor therapist can help clients avoid postpartum issues like back and shoulder pain and hips that don't feel quite balanced—or solve those problems if they arise.

## How to Access Care

Some insurance providers require a referral from a primary care provider (PCP) before seeing a pelvic floor therapist, while others may accept appointments without a referral. Insurance providers also offer directories for specialists in the area. Asking friends and family or searching online for local providers is another way to locate a pelvic floor therapist.

# MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



**M**ental health professionals focusing on perinatal mental health help people who are currently pregnant, planning to be, or have had a baby take care of their mental health. Depending on their training, these professionals—like therapists, who provide counseling, and psychiatrists, who provide medicine—can support postpartum depression, pregnancy and postpartum anxiety, and pregnancy and postpartum OCD.

These professionals may also assist in processing unique feelings arising from pregnancy and birth experiences.

Depending on the professional, they may offer perspectives and methods to help mamas and birthing people constructively navigate these feelings. Networks like [Postpartum Support International](#) can provide more information about disorders, the different kinds of counselors vs. therapists, and other vital topics. It's never too late to get help as a new parent for any stage of the journey. These specialists are there to discuss what is most important to mamas and birthing people as they navigate pregnancy and the postpartum period.

## How to Access Care

There are multiple ways to begin working with a perinatal mental health professional. If working with a therapist or counselor, mamas and birthing people can ask them for recommendations based on their current therapy method and needs. Otherwise, perinatal mental health professionals can be found through insurance providers or portals like [Therapy for Black Girls](#) or [Psychology Today](#). Both platforms have filters for a therapist's specialty, like infertility, difficulty conceiving, and prenatal or postpartum concerns. Some organizations, such as the [Loveland Foundation](#) and the [Open Path Collective](#), provide financial support options to help people access mental healthcare.

# MATERNAL-FETAL MEDICINE SPECIALIST



**M**aternal Fetal Medicine (MFM) Specialists are doctors who specialize in high-risk pregnancies. They help mamas and birthing people before, during, and after pregnancy to limit the chance of issues for them and their babies. They perform ultrasounds and customize maternal care before delivery to ensure that mamas, birthing people, and their babies are safe. An obstetrician can refer a pregnant person to an MFM Specialist if they have an existing medical condition, if they develop a medical condition while pregnant, or if complications arise with the baby.

Support from an MFM can include altering prescriptions so they don't harm a pregnancy, creating a plan for healthier eating, and working with other professionals to ensure the safety of mamas, birthing people, and their babies. These and other actions can help solve health challenges and make people feel more confident in how their pregnancy will progress.

## How to Access Care

An obstetrician can refer patients to an MFM for support before, during, and after pregnancy.

# LABOR AND DELIVERY NURSES



**L**abor and Delivery Nurses are medical professionals who examine mamas and birthing people, take note of their health history, and give medicine when needed. They are the main people to work closely with obstetricians and other care team members to coordinate care.

As registered nurses with additional infant care and maternal health certifications, these individuals can monitor mamas and birthing people's progress during labor. After birth, they can help provide lactation support, assist with bathing, swaddling, or soothing the baby, and ensure that the mama or birthing person is as comfortable as possible as they recover.

## How to Access Care

Labor and Delivery Nurses are usually assigned upon arrival at a hospital or birthing center.

# PEDIATRICIANS



**A** pediatrician is a doctor for infants, children, adolescents, and young adults. They offer support by providing medical tools and resources to ensure their patients and their families remain healthy and well. They can help prevent and manage health issues that can appear as their patients grow and develop.

Many pediatricians help with common issues like ear infections, administering vaccines, and diagnosing and treating minor injuries. Pediatricians also refer their patients to pediatric dentists, surgeons, etc. They can also refer mamas and birthing people to mental health specialists if needed.

## How to Access Care

Because newborns need to see a pediatrician frequently in their first year of life, it's a good idea to establish care with one before delivery or within the first few days of birth. Pediatricians can be located in many ways, including word-of-mouth referrals from loved ones or searching through available health coverage for an in-network provider nearby.





# ANESTHESIOLOGISTS

**A**n anesthesiologist is a doctor who gives medicine to treat pain before, during, or after medical procedures to make mamas and birthing people more comfortable. They also provide treatment and support during emergency situations if they occur.

If desired, this doctor can offer an epidural and other treatment options to relieve pain or general discomfort to a mama or birthing person. An epidural is a form of medicine given to help ease labor pains that could arise in the beginning, middle, or even toward the end of birth. This medicine can help one feel more comfortable giving birth while still feeling different pressure sensations throughout the birthing process. If delivery occurs via Cesarean—known as a C-section—an anesthesiologist can offer medicine to numb the lower half of the body and incision area.

Mamas and birthing people should ask about the kinds of comfort measures available through anesthesiologists at their chosen birthing location, as it varies.

## How to Access Care

Anesthesiologists work in hospitals and can significantly ensure the birthing process is as comfortable and safe as possible. Patients are assigned an anesthesiologist to support them when they arrive at the hospital. For various reasons, some mamas and birthing people will need to meet with their anesthesiologist before labor begins.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# RESOURCES

## Rights and Self-Advocacy

- [Black Birthing Bill of Rights](#) from the National Association of Black Birth - Rights for Black women and birthing people
- [Birthing People's Bill of Rights](#) - Information about self-advocacy, COVID-19, and informed decision-making
- [Mommy Stay-at-Home Toolkit](#) - Music, fitness activities, information about COVID-19, and creating a birth plan
- [Black Mamas Matter Alliance](#) - advocacy for Black Mamas

## Warning Signs During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period

- [Urgent Maternal Warning Signs](#) - Information about warning signs to look out for during pregnancy and the postpartum period

## Loss and Grief

- [Postpartum Support International Loss & Grief in Pregnancy and Postpartum](#) - Support groups, provider directory, and other resources for people experiencing pregnancy, infant and child loss
- [Star Legacy Foundation Family Support](#) - A support line, peer companions, and support groups for people who have experienced all types of perinatal loss

## Paternal Support

- [Postpartum Support International Help For Dads](#) - Online support groups, fatherhood specialists, and connections to local support
- [Fatherhood.gov](#) - Blog, local resource directory, and other resources for fathers and father figures

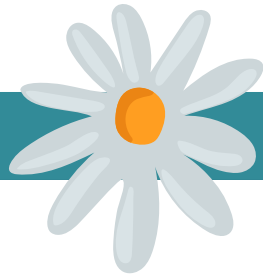
## Lactation Support

- [La Leche League International](#) - Parent-to-parent support for lactation
- [Chocolate Milk Café](#) - Peer-led lactation support for people throughout the African Diaspora
- [Midnight Milk Club](#) - After-hours infant feeding, pregnancy, and postpartum virtual support group

## Mental Health Support

- [Postpartum Support International](#) - Online support groups, peer mentor programs, mental health provider directory, and more
- [Shades of Blue Project](#) - Resource center and online support groups for pregnancy, postpartum, teen mamas, pregnancy loss, single moms, LGBTQ+ birthing people, and general mental health support
- [National Maternal Mental Health Hotline](#) - Free and confidential mental health support available 24/7 via phone call and text for before, during, and after pregnancy

## FINAL NOTE



We hope this e-book empowers all who read it and serves as a quality starting point for learning about the many professionals who can support mamas and birthing people during the prenatal, pregnancy, and perinatal periods. Please know that this is not an exhaustive list and that there are other providers, such as nutritionists, that can also be very beneficial in supporting pregnant people.

We recognize that some providers included in this project may be difficult to access based on location and other factors. That exact lack of access reflects how much more work is required to ensure that people can receive the kind of care they need and deserve, no matter where they live, their race, or how much money they make. This e-book is one of the many ways that RH Impact: The Collaborative for Equity and Justice works towards creating a world where Black communities can achieve our full potential for reproductive health, wellbeing, safety, and joy. Thank you for reading and sharing!

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