

CHALLENGE AWARDS 2025

Category: Health and Human Services

Population: Urban

Submission Title: Delivering Justice: Doula-Led Carceral Perinatal Care

Overview (25 words max): Los Angeles County's Care First Community Investment Doula Program provides culturally responsive doula and wraparound perinatal support to currently and previously incarcerated pregnant people.

Challenge: Each year, hundreds of pregnant people – disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and other people of color – are incarcerated in California. Incarceration during pregnancy, compounded by systemic neglect and isolation, increases the risk of poor maternal and infant outcomes.

Solution: Grounded in birth equity, the Care First Community Investment (CFCI) Doula Program works to restore dignity and autonomy for incarcerated birthing people through culturally respectful, community-based care that affirms every person's right to a safe, supported pregnancy and birth. Bolstered by the passage of AB732 (2020), which allows incarcerated individuals to elect to have a support person present during childbirth, the program is based at LA County's women's jail and was co-created by community doulas, clinicians, people impacted by incarceration, and the public health leaders who developed Public Health's first doula program in 2019.

Doulas provide nonjudgmental emotional, physical, and informational support across pregnancy, labor (including pregnancy loss), postpartum, and re-entry. Weekly visits from trauma-informed doulas, integrated mental health support, and lactation assistance reduce isolation, promote healing, and strengthen resilience. The program collaborates with sister Departments and multidisciplinary teams regarding wraparound care, mother-baby separation, and re-entry coordination, improving outcomes while transforming reproductive care in carceral systems.

Innovation: Collaboration across County departments has led to joint policies, practice changes, streamlined communication, integrated workforce training, and a coordinated approach to perinatal care that acknowledges doulas as critical members of the care team.

Results: Since its inception in 2023, the CFCI Doula Program has received over 250 referrals and enrolled 108 clients who average 120 days in the program. Through the County’s “care first, jails last” efforts to divert pregnant women, many clients leave the facility before delivering, but 32 deliveries have been doula-attended. The program’s mental health pilot launched in early 2025 and has referred 14 clients for perinatal mental health support. The program’s lactation pilot supports safe milk expression, storage, and shipment to infants separated from incarcerated parents, with 11 clients referred in its first six months. Doulas continue to support justice-impacted individuals during re-entry. The doulas and program staff have found that trust, relationship-building, and co-design with community doulas and those experienced in carceral systems are foundational, and that re-entry continuity of care is essential but under-resourced.

Replicability: Los Angeles has developed materials, partnerships, and lessons learned that can guide replication of the CFCI Doula Program. In 2024, the U.S. Government Accountability Office visited LA and other sites nationwide to study programs like the CFCI Doula Program, and shared insights in *Pregnant Women in State Prisons and Local Jails: Federal Assistance to Support Their Care* (GAO-25-106404). We encourage others seeking to replicate this work to ground efforts in core values of racial and reproductive justice, prioritize partnerships with impacted communities, and anticipate challenges within systems not designed for care or healing. While this work can be difficult, it holds profound potential to transform lives and reimagine justice and wellness for all.

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Additional Materials: [GAO-25-106404](#)