



What to Consider Before Becoming a Doula

A doula provides emotional, physical, and spiritual support for expectant mothers and their families during pregnancy, labour, and the postpartum period. Building on the role of the traditional Aunty, First Nation and Aboriginal doulas can assist in honouring traditional and spiritual practices and beliefs associated with maternity care and support the language and cultural needs of the woman and her family.

Being a professionally trained doula can be an extremely rewarding occupation. If you are thinking of becoming a doula, you are encouraged to review this document. The information below will help you understand what is involved in becoming and practicing as a doula and help you be successful as a doula.

1. Time Commitment

It takes commitment to be a doula. Before embarking on this career choice and enrolling in a training program, a doula is encouraged to become familiar with the training and certification process and requirements, including study time, practical experience, and administrative paperwork. Certification is not mandatory to practice as a doula, but having certification from DONA (Doulas of North America) shows that the doula has met a high international standard, which helps ensure expectant parents, their families, and their health care providers that the doula will adhere to the highest standards of conduct and ethics.

Having DONA certification may sometimes be preferred by women and their families or organizations. It is also increasingly recognized within the health care system. Visit Doula Training and Certification on the FNHA website for more information, contact the training and certification organizations to find out exactly what their requirements are, and talk to other trained doulas who have already completed the process to get a sense of what the time commitment, expectations, and limitations are.

Babies come at all hours, which makes doula work unpredictable. A doula will need to work flexible hours, including evenings or weekends as necessary and be available on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to support families. Depending on the emotional, physical, and support needs of the expectant mother, a doula may need to commit varying degrees of time with each expectant mother and her family. A doula may go long periods of time without clients in smaller communities where few women may be pregnant at a given time.

A doula may face challenges around time management and competing priorities, for example, doula practice, other work, and their own family obligations. It is imperative that a practicing doula have a back-up doula to assist clients in case of an emergency or if personal time is needed.

2. Financial and Infrastructure Requirements

A doula may need to obtain adequate funding to cover costs for training and the delivery of doula services, including: training registration fees and textbooks; transportation, telephone communication, and parking; and doula awareness building materials and events. It is suggested

First Nation and Aboriginal doulas can assist in honouring traditional and spiritual practices and beliefs associated with maternity care and support the language and cultural needs of the woman and her family.

Strong personal and professional connections with other health care providers within the community are also extremely beneficial to ensure referrals and offers a way to increase professional development opportunities in maternity care.



that a doula reach out to community partners and organizations to seek financial or in-kind support, including available grants.

It might be challenging to secure appropriate meeting spaces for clients. A doula can connect with a friendship centre, health centre, or community-based organization to set up an agreed to and available meeting space.

It is important for a doula to be knowledgeable about existing community resources that can further support mothers and their families. A doula should connect with community groups for support and to build awareness of doula services.

3. Personal and Professional Support

It is important to have a strong personal and professional support network, including your family, friends, and co-workers.

A doula should reach out to existing doulas, as support from other doulas can be very helpful. A doula can look for networking and professional development opportunities with doula associations, join their email lists or Facebook groups, and attend their education events. Being a part of an association enables a doula to learn from existing doulas who are practicing - their success stories, how they have overcome challenges, and what advice they have.

Some doula associations include:

- **Doula Services Association** (www.bcdoulas.org)
- **Doulas of North America (DONA)**, (www.dona.org)
- **Doulas of Victoria** (www.doulasofvictoria.ca)

There may be additional sub-regional associations; doulas are encouraged to look for a local association, or even start their own.

It is also helpful to connect with Elders in your community for support, to be your mentor, and to learn more about local birthing teachings, traditions, and practices. Strong personal and professional connections with other health care providers within the community are also extremely beneficial to ensure referrals and offers a way to increase professional development opportunities in maternity care.

4. Communications

A doula must have reliable means of communication, including good cell phone coverage and an adequate number of minutes - this will help to ensure timely and quality care for families. Know that in some communities, cell phone reception is unavailable, and clients may not have cell phones either.

However, the client may also prefer other ways to communicate, including email and Facebook. What is important is for a doula to ensure a timely response to requests, whether by phone or email.

An effective way to build awareness of doula services is to have something to leave in the hands of people, so that they can read, learn, and remember the benefits of accessing doula services.



5. Travel

A doula should have a driver's licence and access to a reliable vehicle or access to adequate public transportation. A doula needs to be able to travel to meet and help expectant mothers and their families. Long distance travel might be involved to assist women in other communities who might have limited access to a doula.

6. Physical Requirements

Fitness and endurance are factors to consider before participating in training. A doula may need to stand for extended periods, lift, bend, and reach. A doula may also need to go without sleep for as long as the labour takes.

7. Building Relationships and Increasing Awareness

The key to sustaining a strong doula practice is by building meaningful relationships within communities. This will increase awareness about doula services and help reach potential clients. Building relationships is not a one-time activity but rather an ongoing aspect of doula work - a doula needs to be willing and prepared to do this networking and promotional work. This can be done by participating in community events and connecting with other health care providers.

If a doula has pre-established relationships and connections within communities, it is likely the doula will find it easier to network, promote their services, and reach clients. If a doula is new to the community or does not have those relationships yet, there are many ways to build a strong community network. The following are recommended strategies to build relationships and promote doula services.

a) Doula Awareness Materials

An effective way to build awareness of doula services is to have something to leave in the hands of people, so that they can read, learn, and remember the benefits of accessing doula services. It is important that this information is clear, concise, and engaging as health literacy can be a challenge for some people.

It is recommended that a doula have promotional material on hand, including:

- A flyer or handout (see Doula Resources on FNHA website for a sample) describing what a doula is, the benefits women and families will experience when they have a doula, and the referral process; and/or
- Business cards or postcards (see Doula Resources on FNHA website for a sample) to hand out to potential clients and community organizations and at networking events.

b) Promotional Activities

Below is a list of suggested activities that a doula can do to increase awareness of doula services:

- Present at band meetings, hub meetings, and community meetings.
- Distribute flyers in friendship centres and band offices.
- Place ads in band newsletters.

Organizations such as friendship centres, band offices, hubs, local health centres, and schools are essential for raising awareness and gaining support for doulas and doula services.

- Submit articles in newsletters of First Nations/Aboriginal organizations.
- Host an information session/table at prenatal classes and parenting sessions.
- Host an information table at health or career fairs.
- Submit articles in local newspaper, do interviews with radio/TV.
- Attend Pow Wows, Potlatches, and other culture events.
- Present at Elders Gathering and Elders lunches.
- Time promotion work around Aboriginal Mother's Day.
- Present at school parent/teacher association meetings.
- Put posters up in nursing stations, public health clinics, health centres, hospitals, child and family service centres, local churches, stores, and other retail outlets if available.
- Connect with local health care providers (community workers, nurses, midwives, and physicians).
- Connect with a local First Nations/Aboriginal navigator or liaison if there is one in the area.
- Host events with early childhood development, child care, and maternal health programs.
- Provide business cards to professionals providing home/family support to women and families, such as home support workers, health nurses, Aboriginal Infant Development consultants as they may know of women that could benefit from these services.
- Help host or involve yourself in community activities (Welcoming Babies or Naming Ceremonies).

c) Engage the Community

The more individuals a doula can connect with, the more support and referrals a doula is likely to receive. Organizations such as friendship centres, band offices, hubs, local health centres, and schools are essential for raising awareness and gaining support for doulas and doula services. Friendship centres, health centres, child and family centres, early childhood development programs, and child care programs can spread the word about doula services and act as safe locations for doulas to meet with clients.

Involve community groups and local businesses when organizing awareness events - ask them to sponsor or co-host events. Invite Elders to be involved by providing opening and closing prayers, reflections, guidance, encouragement and sharing knowledge and stories about maternity care practice.

Some important community partners a doula should work with include:

- Maternal and child health services
- Community health and social services
- Local midwives, physicians, maternity nurses, and medical students
- Friendship centres
- Public health units, community health nurses, and home support workers
- Elders



In summary, the work of a doula can be very rewarding profession because it has a direct impact on the health and wellness of expectant mothers and their families.

d) Collaborate with Health Care Providers

It is important for a doula to establish credibility with local health care providers, so they can understand, appreciate, and work collaboratively with doulas to improve outcomes for mothers and babies. Health care providers can also talk to women about whether a doula is right for them and help refer them to a doula for support. A doula can set up meetings with partners at community health centres, public health units, and acute care facilities to establish these relationships.

Final Note

In summary, the work of a doula can be very rewarding profession because it has a direct impact on the health and wellness of expectant mothers and their families. As described above, there are a number of factors to consider when thinking about pursuing training and practice as a doula. With many of the above supports in place, a doula can pursue excellence in their role as a valued professional supporting women and their families.

The information in this document is based on the evaluation of the Tripartite Aboriginal Doula Initiative, a pilot project which was conducted in the Vancouver Island and Interior regions and involved First Nations/Aboriginal women learners in the area.

