



New Report: Nurturing the Nurturers Strengthening Policy to Support Community-Based Doulas' Early Relational Health Work

Both these things are true: Doulas can play a key role in improving perinatal outcomes, and there are limited resources to grow and sustain this workforce. Where some see a challenge, others see opportunity. That's why [Nurture Connection](#), the [Center for the Study of Social Policy](#), and [HealthConnect One](#) partnered with community-based doulas in a two-year project designed to explore the role of doulas in advancing Early Relational Health (ERH) and offer policy recommendations to support access to and financing of these vital workers.

"The pilot project with community-based doulas deepened my understanding and appreciation for the value of community-centered, ancestral wisdom when building healthy relationships and sharing healing practices," says report coauthor Hoda Shawky, a pediatric nurse practitioner, maternal child health equity consultant, and doula. "The multigenerational impact that doulas bring to their communities cannot be overstated. The voices of the doulas have been the driver in shaping this report. We are grateful for their willingness to participate, share authentically, and guide us." Shawky is the founder of Noorture, a spiritually centered approach to nurturing parents and their young ones.

Nurture Connection's recently released report [Community-Based Doulas and Early Relational Health: The Role of Public Policy and Financing](#) calls for expanding use of Medicaid to finance doula services, streamlining administrative and billing mechanisms to support doula practice, and allocating resources for training and supervision to expand the workforce. The report includes an analysis of current doula policies, while detailing where existing policies fall short in ensuring that community-based doulas can best provide perinatal and Early Relational Health support. The recommendations are based on lessons learned from the project, including that policies need to finance community-based doula work to promote ERH and well-being for mothers, babies, and families.

Coauthored by Kay Johnson, Hoda Shawky, and David Willis, this report also calls for additional federal and state action in development, adoption, and effective implementation of policies to ensure that doulas remain an essential component of the perinatal and ERH workforce and that their numbers increase to reflect current need. As a national crisis on maternal and infant mortality continues with widening racial disparities, it's critical to have policy action that can improve access to community-based doulas for birthing people of color and those with low incomes served by Medicaid, according to the report's authors.

"This publication provides a synthesis and update of a number of prior reports regarding policy and financing for doula care," says Johnson, president of Johnson Policy Consulting. Adds the Nurture Connection policy lead, who is a veteran maternal child health policy advocate: "It builds on knowledge and ideas in the field and offers refined recommendations for the current policy context."

This report is one effort Nurture Connection is involved with in its ongoing work to engage those who provide services to families with young children in promoting ERH. "This project transformed my understanding of how a doula may be in relationship with a new family, often sharing their own personal narrative and healing journey. With an Early Relational Health mindset, this courageous work fosters hope and resiliency," says David Willis, Nurture Connection lead and senior fellow with the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

For more on NC's work with community-based doulas, read [this blog post](#) and click on the link to the "ERH in Action" listening and learning session with birth workers. Learn more [here](#) about the Center for the Study of Social Policy and HealthConnect One's previous partnership work.

Parent Perspective



Question: Why are you involved in the Family Network Collaborative?

Hope Williams-Burt - Mother, Birth Justice Advocate, Organizer and Parent Leader in California: "My life journey through birth, parenting and community connection has shown me that success and impactful change is possible when we see, hear and partner with one another. I'm am involved in this work, because I want to create more spaces for community leadership, and for community co-creation to be a standard model of care across all systems."

To learn more about the Family Network Collaborative at Nurture Connection, visit our website [here](#).

Explore More



[ERH in Action with HealthConnect One: Birth Workers Provide Vital Care to Parents and Newborns](#)

This [blog on HealthConnect One](#) is part of Nurture Connection's "ERH in Action" series of listening and learning sessions designed to highlight and uplift



What is Early Relational Health?

Early Relational Health is the state of emotional well-being that grows from emotional connection between babies and toddlers and their parents and caregivers when they experience strong, positive, and nurturing relationships with each other.

ERH is foundational to children's healthy growth and development and parents'

bright spots in the movement. National organizations like HealthConnect One play a pivotal role in advancing Early Relational Health by providing training, research, advocacy, and education for community birth workers who serve Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities.

[Read Here](#)



Save the Date: Recognizing the Power of Early Relational Health in the Community-based Doula Movement

Join us Thursday, September 19, 2024 from 1:00-2:00pm EDT for the webinar "Recognizing the Power of Early Relational Health in the Community-based Doula Movement."

Presenters will share their experiences expanding on a community-based doula training curriculum to deepen the foundational impact of early relationships between children and their caregivers. A partnership between HealthConnect One and Nurture Connection, presenters will highlight the co-design process of creating the content with doulas and share insights into the implementation and impact of Early Relational Health training. Presenters will also share a set of policy recommendations to support the practice of community-based doulas based on learnings from this partnership.

Presenters include:

- Twylla Dillon, President and CEO, HealthConnect One
- Hoda Shawky, MSN, CPNP, PMHS, IBCLC, Noorture, LLC
- Kay Johnson, Johnson Policy Consulting, LLC
- David Willis, MD, Nurture Connection

and caregivers' sense of competence, connection, and overall well-being. These strong and enduring relationships also help to protect the family from the harmful effects of stress.

Core ERH Resources

Frameworks Institute. [Building Relationships: Framing Early Relational Health](#). Prepared in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Social Policy. May 2020.

Willis D, Chavez S, Lee J, Hampton P, Fine A. [Early Relational Health National Survey: What We're Learning from the Field](#). Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2020.

Willis D, Sege R, Johnson K. [Changing the Mindset: Foundational Relationships Counter Adversity with HOPE](#). (Blog) Center for the Study of Social Policy. May 2020.

Perspectives on ERH Video Series. [Perspectives on Early Relational Health Series](#). Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2022.

Center of the Study of Social Policy and Health+ Studio. [How to Communicate Effectively About Early Relational Health: What It Is and Why It Matters](#). 2022.

Find additional resources on our [website](#).

What We're Reading

- Cordoba, David J., et al. (July 2024), Parents' Perspectives on Early Relational Health: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* . [Read here](#).

- Reflecting on parent-infant relationships: a practitioner's guide to starting conversations. *UK Department of Health and Social Care* (2024). [Read here.](#)
- Willis, David W. & Cailin O'Connor (Summer 2024), Advancing Early Relational Health Policy in Support of Next Generation Flourishing. *Family Justice Journal*, Issue 3. Pages 54-59. [Read here.](#)
- Turner, Cory, NPR (July 23, 2024). "Babies Don't come with instructions. But in Oregon, they now come with a nurse." [Read here.](#)

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Contact
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[The Center for the Study of Social Policy \(CSSP\)](#), which conceived Nurture Connection, is a national, non-profit policy organization that connects community action, public system reform, and policy change to create a fair and just society in which all children and families thrive. We work to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. To do this, we translate ideas into action, promote public policies grounded in equity, support strong and inclusive communities, and advocate with and for all children and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices.



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