



Birth Centers in the United States

Midwifery-led birth centers save lives. The United States ranks 55th in the world for maternal mortality rate despite spending more than any other country on maternity care. The U.S. maternal health crisis is exacerbated in marginalized communities, particularly in rural and underserved areas, where the crisis worsens due to limited access to quality care, which deepens health disparities.

Midwifery-led birth centers are an evidence-based model that delivers outcomes comparable to those of the top nations globally by offering holistic, family-centered care that protects and empowers patients, thereby enhancing both physical and mental well-being in our community.

What is a freestanding birth center?

The birth center is a health care facility for childbirth where care is provided in the midwifery and wellness model. The birth center is freestanding and not a hospital.

Birth centers are an integrated part of the health care system and are guided by principles of prevention, sensitivity, safety, appropriate medical intervention, and cost-effectiveness. While the practice of midwifery and the support of physiologic birth and newborn transition may occur in other settings, this is the exclusive model of care in a birth center.

The birth center respects and facilitates a client's right to make informed choices about their health care and their baby's health care based on their values and beliefs. The client's family, as they define it, is welcome to participate in the pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period.

Who provides care in birth centers?

Care is provided in the midwifery model by midwives who are licensed by their state. Birth center midwives include Certified Professional Midwives, Certified Midwives, and Certified Nurse-Midwives. A small percentage of birth center births are attended by physicians (1%).

How are birth centers regulated?

Birth centers are licensed health care facilities that follow state regulations set by individual states and national standards established by the American Association of Birth Centers. The Commission for the Accreditation of Birth Centers uses these standards to accredit birth centers.

In their Consensus Statement on Levels of Maternal Care (2019), the American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine include the freestanding birth center as a distinct level of care and recommend that birth centers follow the AABC Standards for Birth Centers in terms of staffing and clinical operations.

Why do we need more birth centers?

- Midwifery-led birth centers deliver sought-after outcomes, including:
 - Cesarean birth rates under 6%
 - NICU admissions less than half the national average
 - Low rates of interventions, with superior outcomes

These outcomes reflect the clinical excellence and fiscal prudence of the birth center model, which reduces complications, interventions, and overall healthcare costs while maintaining world-standard safety, lowering the risk of maternal mortality, and prioritizing maternal autonomy and satisfaction.

- Outcomes from the U.S. and other countries show that the midwifery model of care can improve outcomes, especially for low-risk pregnancies. Midwives are currently underutilized in the U.S., attending 12% of all births, compared to European countries where midwives attend 60-80% of all births. In states where midwives attend a higher percentage of births, outcomes are better.
- We are facing a growing shortage of maternity care providers and facilities providing this care. People must drive further and further for prenatal visits and birth, which leads to less care and worse outcomes. The March of Dimes monitors this growing shortage and reports that 36% of all US Counties are maternity care deserts, which means there is no hospital or birth center in the county and no obstetric providers. March of Dimes states that freestanding birth centers are part of the solution to this problem.

Why are the Midwives for MOMS Act and the BABIES Act important to increase access to maternity care?

- The Midwives for MOMS Act will increase the midwifery workforce with more midwives being educated each year.
- The BABIES Act will help freestanding birth centers be more sustainable with cost-based reimbursement. Growing the numbers of birth centers will lead to cost savings for Medicaid and other payors.

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