

Executive Summary: Health Impact Review of SB 6172

Concerning birth doulas (2024 Legislative Session)

Evidence indicates that SB 6172 may increase barriers to accessing doula care for some people, which would likely worsen health outcomes for birthing people and their infants and increase inequities.

SB 6172 may also lead to Washington State Department of Health (DOH) conducting rulemaking which may increase awareness of culturally congruent care requirements among some doulas. There is unclear evidence how provisions may impact some doulas seeking state certification and pregnant, birthing, and postpartum people in Washington State.

BILL INFORMATION

Sponsors: Senators Nobles, Randall, Dhingra, Frame, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Lovelett, Nguyen, Saldaña, Shewmake, Trudeau, Wilson, C.

Summary of Bill:

- Defines “culturally congruent care” and requires birth doulasⁱ seeking state certification to provide proof of knowledge related to culturally congruent care for state certification.ⁱⁱ
- Clarifies that birth doulas provide support to birthing persons “from the date of confirmed conception.”
- Removes the Secretary of Health’s ability to impose a fee for state certification, examination, or renewal for those seeking birth doula certification between July 1, 2025, and July 1, 2030, and caps fees allowable after July 1, 2030, subject to appropriations.

HEALTH IMPACT REVIEW

Summary of Findings:

This Health Impact Review found the following evidence for SB 6172:

Pathway 1: Confirmed conception

- **Informed assumption** that clarifying that birth doulas provide support to birthing persons “from the date of confirmed conception” may increase barriers to accessing doula care for some people. This assumption is based on information from key informants.
- **Very strong evidence** that increasing barriers to accessing doula care would likely worsen health outcomes for birthing people and their infants.
- **Very strong evidence** that worsening health outcomes for birthing people and their infants would worsen inequities.

Pathway 2: Rulemaking

- **Informed assumption** that defining culturally congruent care and requiring birth doulas to provide proof of knowledge related to culturally congruent care for state certification may result in the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) conducting rulemaking. This assumption is based on information from key informants and bill and law language.

For more information:
Phone: (360) 819-0750
Email: hir@sboh.wa.gov
sboh.wa.gov/hir

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- **Informed assumption** that removing the Secretary of Health’s ability to impose a fee for state certification, examination, or renewal for those seeking birth doula certification between July 1, 2025, and July 1, 2030, and capping allowable fees after July 1, 2030, may result in DOH conducting rulemaking. This assumption is based on information from key informants and bill and law language.
- **Informed assumption** that DOH conducting rulemaking may increase awareness of culturally congruent care requirements among some doulas. This assumption is based on information from key informants.
- **Unclear evidence** how increased awareness of culturally congruent care requirements among some doulas may impact pregnant, birthing, and postpartum people in Washington State.
- **Unclear evidence** how DOH conducting rulemaking may impact some doulas seeking state certification.
- “Additional Considerations” includes potential impacts of Washington State Medicaid program (Apple Health)ⁱⁱⁱ reimbursement for doula care.

FULL REVIEW

For review methods, logic model, strength-of-evidence analyses, and citations of empirical evidence refer to the full Health Impact Review at

https://sboh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-02/HIR-2024-08-SB6172_0.pdf

ⁱ There are multiple types of doulas who provide support to people and families at different stages of life (e.g. birth doula, bereavement doula) (personal communications, January 2024). This report focuses on birth doulas as defined in [RCW 18.47.010](#) and uses the term doula when referring to a “nonmedical birth coach or support person trained to provide physical, emotional, and informational support to birthing persons during pregnancy, antepartum, labor, birth, and the postpartum period.”

ⁱⁱ Doulas noted distinctions between “credentialing”, “certification”, and “state certification” (personal communications, January 2024). Credentialing is broader than certification and state certification, and may include certification, training, experience, etc. (personal communications, January 2024). Doulas of color noted that outside organizations have appropriated (i.e., taken without permission) cultural practices or traditional knowledge from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and monetized that information for trainings and certification programs (personal communications, January 2024). Doulas of color recommended use of the term “credentialing” to refer to general requirements for birth doulas (personal communications, January 2024). This report uses “state certification” when discussing specific provisions of SB 6172 and current Washington State laws (RCW) and rules and regulations (WAC) specific to the state’s birth doula certification program.

ⁱⁱⁱ Apple Health is the Washington State Medicaid program. In this report, the use of Medicaid will be retained to refer to the federal Medicaid program or to research related to national or other state Medicaid programs.

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