



Consumer brochure – Role of the doula

The role of a doula

A doula is a companion who understands the emotional and physical needs of a woman and her family throughout her pregnancy, labour, birth and early postnatal period, and provides continuous non-clinical support and non-clinical care for a woman throughout her whole experience.

Doulas are not registered health professionals and their services are unregulated. Some may undertake a 'doula' course offered by an unregistered training provider. Such courses may range from 2 – 6 days and focus on issues of communication and social support. Ask your doula what level of education and experience they have. **The title of doula can be used by anyone.** Your doula should be able to provide you with a comprehensive outline of their experience, ability, education and evaluations from previous clients.

The WA Country Health Service supports your choice to privately employ a doula for emotional and physical support during your labour.

There can be a lack of understanding of the roles of a midwife and a doula, which can lead to confusion, particularly if the doula you employ may have a midwifery qualification. Any doula cannot act in any capacity as a midwife during your care, this includes giving clinical advice or clinical tasks such your fetal heart, blood pressures, contraction assessment, vaginal examinations or diagnosing conditions. It is against the law in Western Australia for a doula to provide any clinical care during labour or birth (which may result in a \$30,000 fine).

To reduce role confusion we appreciate your assistance with the following framework for care:

- We encourage you to bring your doula to antenatal appointments to promote trusting relationships and information sharing
- We encourage you to develop your birth plan with our midwife /doctor by 36 weeks
- Please contact the midwife if you think you are in labour (prior to calling your doula)
- Your doula will be included as one of your two support people in labour
- **Your doula cannot:**
 - speak for you or make decisions for you to your doctor or midwife: if you are not able to speak in labour then the midwife /doctor will communicate with your partner or next of kin about your wishes
 - provide clinical advice or care; if you have any clinical problems or worries we encourage you to seek advice from your midwife or doctor.
 - be present if you need a caesarean
- Your doula may be asked to leave if the midwife /doctors feel they are interfering with safe treatment or advice during your labour / birth.

If you wish to discuss any of the above information further you can ask to speak to the Maternity manager at your birthing hospital.