



## Birthing Supports

### Sector Strengths & Opportunities Brief

July 2019

#### Maternal Health Network of San Bernardino County

The Maternal Health Network (MHN) of San Bernardino County is a collective of various service providers that support the maternal health system throughout San Bernardino County.

##### Membership includes:

- Prenatal & Post-Partum Primary Care Providers
- Community Clinics & Birthing Hospitals
- Oral Health Providers & Advocates
- San Bernardino County Public Health
- Midwives & Doulas
- Family Resource & Support Service Organizations
- Breastfeeding Support Services & Coalitions
- Behavioral Health & Substance Abuse Providers
- Law Enforcement & Detentions
- School-based Services
- Health Plans

##### Vision

The Maternal Health Network of San Bernardino County empowers, respects and supports families before, during and after pregnancy to optimize health and wellbeing for babies and mothers.

The MHN operates utilizing the following principles:

Equity • Integrated • Access • High-Quality • Support

#### Strengths and Opportunities Analysis

The MHN commissioned a strengths and opportunities analysis to understand and document the broad landscape of existing maternal health components within the County.

Areas of exploration included:



##### Maternal Health Status

Maternal health status indicators and data were gathered and analyzed to understand the current reality facing families in the county.



##### Maternal Health Resources

Maternal health resources were mapped to help identify where resources are located and where gaps exist. Information on barriers to access and service satisfaction was also collected.



##### Systems Issues

Maternal health systems issues were explored to understand the strengths and weaknesses of how services are delivered.

#### Value of Birthing Supports

Birthing supports comprise individuals and organizations that provide prenatal services such as birthing education and other preparatory activities, as well as providing a location for and/or assisting in the actual birthing process. Ideal birthing supports help ensure that families have the birth experience of their choosing by providing safe options grounded in both best practices and current research, as well as based around the pregnant person's preferences, medical history, and personal circumstances.

Families now have more birthing support options to consider than ever before. While most women in California give birth in a hospital, others opt to utilize a birthing center or experience a home birth. Similarly, most pregnant women in California rely on an obstetrician to provide prenatal care and oversee the birthing process, but others choose to utilize a midwife (7-9%) or another medical professional (12-16%). Some will depend on family members, partners, or spouses to provide support during the birth, while others (9% in California) will utilize a paid doula, a non-clinical health worker that offers information, emotional, and physical perinatal support.

Unfortunately some women, due to insurance regulations or medical necessity, will not have options for birth location, support, medical staff, or even birth procedures (e.g. 89% of surveyed women in California said their hospital or maternity care provider did not allow vaginal births after a Cesarean).<sup>1</sup>

One commonality found amongst most women is the belief, trending up since 2002, that childbirth is a process that should not be interfered with unless medically necessary. The variety of birthing support options available in the U.S. is of great value to expectant mothers, but only if they are provided with the information they need to make an informed decision. Open, early communication between families and their birthing supports provide the best opportunity for them to have a satisfying childbirth experience aligned to their personal goals, values, and medical history.

Helping pregnant families understand their options first requires that the broad scope and availability of these resources is understood. The following sections briefly outline areas of strength as well as for improvement, resource availability, and systems issues related to this topic. For the purposes of this brief, birthing support providers encompass baby-friendly hospitals, hospitals with labor and delivery, birthing centers, midwives, and doulas.

<sup>1</sup> All data in this section is from Listening to Mothers: Results from a Population-Based Survey of Women's Childbearing Experiences. (September 2018). California Health Care Foundation. Accessed at <https://www.chcf.org/publication/data-snapshot-listening-mothers-california/>

*This brief provides an overview of the strengths and opportunities relative to birthing supports components of the maternal health system.*

# Maternal Health Status

## Methods

To understand the maternal health status of families in San Bernardino County, maternal health indicators and other data were gathered. The primary data sources for this component of the strengths and opportunities analysis included:

- *San Bernardino Family Health Outcomes Project (FHOP) Indicators.*<sup>2</sup>
- *Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA) Survey County and Regional Data Snapshots, 2013-2014.*<sup>3</sup>
- *Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA) Survey County and Regional Data Snapshots for Subgroups, 2013-2015.*<sup>4</sup>

A workgroup was established with representatives from the birthing supports provider base in San Bernardino County. That workgroup reviewed data regarding the maternal health status of San Bernardino County. Following this review, areas of strength and potential areas for improvement were identified. Additionally, workgroups explored their unique role in impacting potential areas for improvement.

## Areas of Strength

San Bernardino County families are faring well within the following indicators when compared to state and national data:



### Health Insurance Coverage

Most women in San Bernardino County who are pregnant or who are planning to become pregnant have insurance.<sup>2</sup>



### Prenatal Care

In San Bernardino County, women receive prenatal care within the first trimester at rates higher than the state average.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, women receive adequate prenatal care at rates higher than the state average.<sup>2</sup> That said, providers question whether women continue to receive consistent care beyond the first trimester.



### WIC Participation

San Bernardino County has a significantly higher rate of women participating in WIC during pregnancy than the state average, with 60.9% of pregnant women accessing WIC services at some point during their pregnancy.<sup>3,4</sup>

## Areas for Improvement

Areas identified as opportunities for improvement for families within San Bernardino County include:



### Cesarean Births

San Bernardino County has a higher rate of cesarean births (per live births) than the state average.<sup>2</sup>



### Prenatal and Post-partum Supports

9% of recently delivered women in California had no post-partum visits. Women on Medi-Cal were twice as likely to have no post-partum office visits, and more than twice as likely to have no post-partum, emotional or practical support as those with private insurance.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, very few women access the support of midwives or doulas for prenatal or postpartum support.



### Focus on African American/Black Families

African American/Black families fare far worse than other race/ethnicity groups in many maternal health indicators, including early and adequate prenatal care, rates of cesarean births, and vaginal births after cesareans (VBACs).<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>

## Birthing Support Provider Impact on Areas for Improvement

Workgroups identified areas where the birthing supports sector could assist with improvements around indicators associated with maternal health.



Delivery settings should only conduct cesarean births when medically necessary. Hospitals have prioritized this, and as a result, have experienced reductions in the amount of cesarean births that are occurring. Existing incentives for hospitals and providers to reduce cesarean births should continue to be a focus moving forward.



Midwives and doulas routinely provide prenatal and post-partum supports as a component of their practice. They could deepen their efforts around ensuring individuals follow-through on the receipt of post-partum wellness visits and assist families in establishing plans to facilitate access to emotional and practical support following the birth of a child.



Hospitals, midwives and doulas could establish a home visiting model that deploy resources and supports directly following the birth of a child to assist families (with a focus on African American/Black families) in establishing healthy routines with their newborn child.



The field could do more to provide education to practitioners on cultural competent service delivery strategies, as well as services and resources available.

<sup>2</sup>Family Health Outcomes Project. (2018, December). Retrieved from <https://fhop.ucsf.edu/san-bernardino-county-databooks>.

<sup>3</sup>Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA) Survey County and Regional Data Snapshots, 2013-2014. California Department of Public Health. 2016.

<sup>4</sup>Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA) Survey County and Regional Data Snapshots for Subgroups, 2013-2015. California Department of Public Health; 2018.

<sup>5</sup>Listening to Mothers: Results from a Population-Based Survey of Women's Childbearing Experiences. California Health Care Foundation. 2018.

# Maternal Health Resources

## Methods

To understand what supports are available throughout San Bernardino County related to maternal health, resources were mapped according to their type and location. The primary data sources for this component of the strengths and opportunities analysis included:

- *Inland Empire Breastfeeding, Childbirth and Community Resource Guide*
- *San Bernardino County Behavioral Health Directory of Services*
- *San Bernardino County 2-1-1*
- *San Bernardino County Public Health Breastfeeding Resources Flyer*

Additional data was collected directly from key stakeholders to include the Inland Empire Health Plan, the Community Health Association, the Center for Oral Health, the Inland Empire Breastfeeding Coalition, and the Perinatal Advisory Council: Leadership, Advocacy, and Consultation (PAC/LAC).

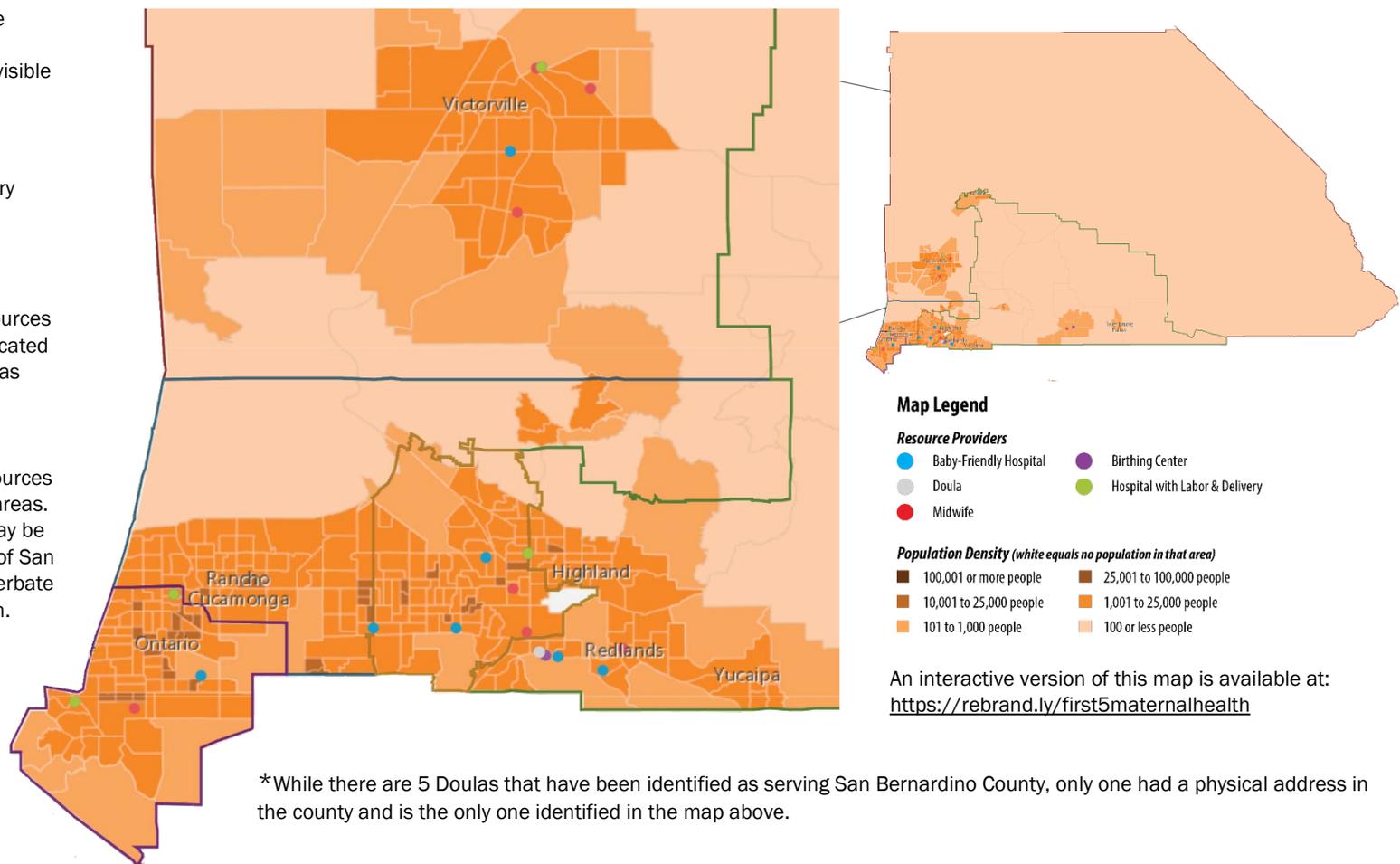
## Birthing Supports Resources

San Bernardino County is host to the following types of birthing support resources (note that not all may be visible on the map due to overlap and dot density):

- 11 Baby-Friendly Hospitals
- 8 Hospitals with Labor & Delivery
- 2 Birthing Centers
- 13 Midwives
- 5 Doulas\*

The majority of birthing support resources within San Bernardino County are located in the southwest part of the county, as illustrated by the map inset. Not surprisingly, resource distribution is positively correlated with population density, with higher numbers of resources being found in the more populated areas. It should be noted that resources may be utilized by individuals living outside of San Bernardino County, which may exacerbate any shortages seen within the region.

The points for doulas and midwives represent their home or preferred service address, but these types of providers are often willing to travel significant distances to serve prospective clients.



\*While there are 5 Doulas that have been identified as serving San Bernardino County, only one had a physical address in the county and is the only one identified in the map above.

Maternal Health Network of San Bernardino County

# Maternal Health Resources

## Barriers to Access

There are a variety of reasons that families may not be able to access the resources they need through the maternal health system. Barriers to access were identified through information provided by birthing support providers as well as through the consumer survey referenced below.

### Lack of Information

System stakeholders identified that there is a general lack of information available to providers as well as consumers regarding the benefits or availability of midwives and doulas. They also indicated that many families don't know that they can deliver their child outside of a hospital setting.

### Travel/Transportation

System stakeholders identified that travel times and lack of transportation can prevent consumers from getting the birthing supports they need if they reside in areas where there are no resources easily available.

### Childcare

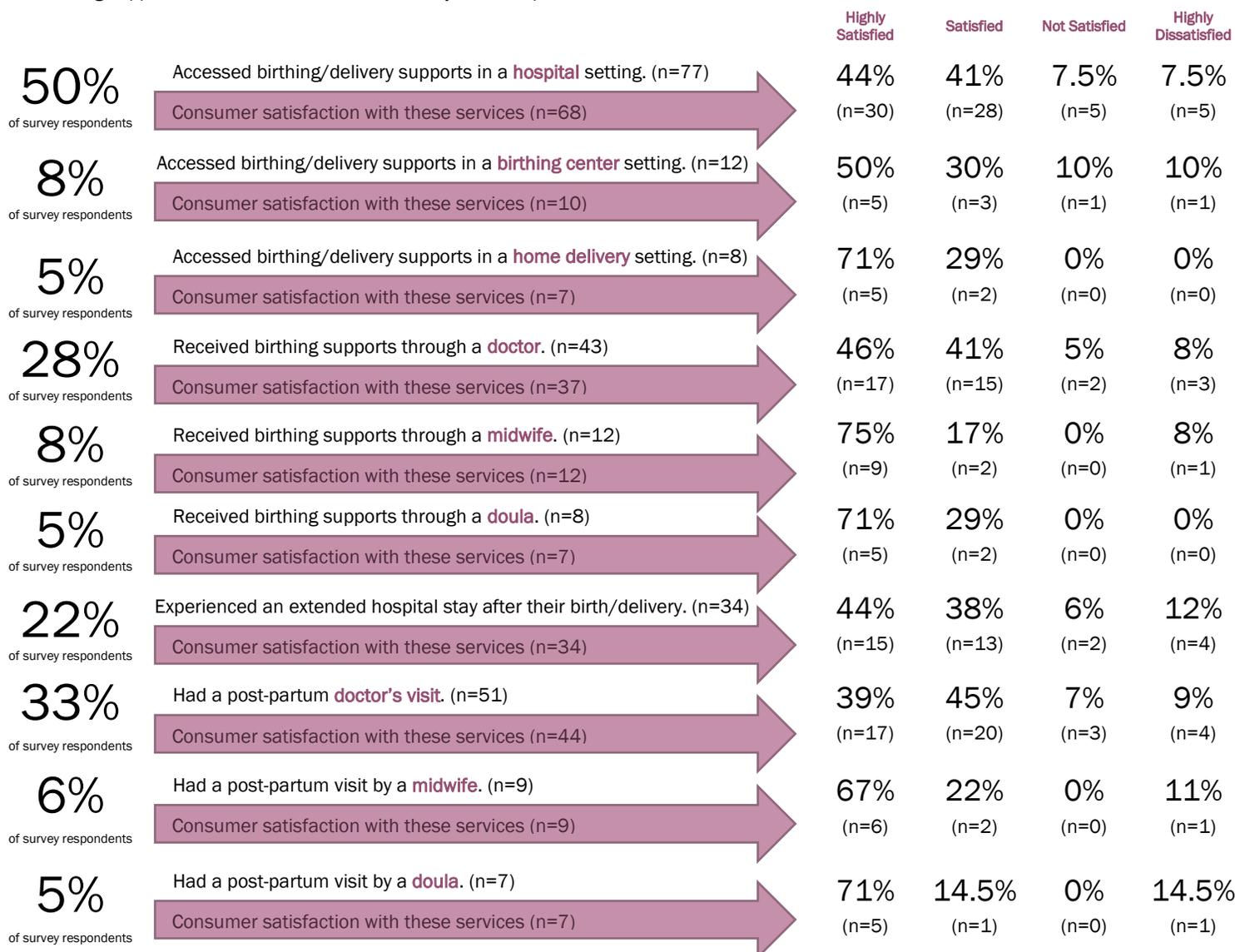
System stakeholders identified that many families have difficulty accessing care due to childcare constraints. Offering a space for children to be occupied during service delivery was identified as a potential solution to this issue.

### Insufficient Resources

System stakeholders identified that the rural areas of the county lack sufficient services, forcing some to cross county or state lines to get the care they need. Additionally, stakeholders identified that there is a lack of sufficient services to support high-risk pregnancies.

## Satisfaction with Services

To determine how well resources are being deployed, a consumer survey was collected from families who are either currently pregnant or who recently delivered a child (within the last year). A total of 154 surveys were collected between June 19<sup>th</sup> and July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Results particular to the birthing supports sector of the maternal health system are provided below.



\*Some survey respondents indicated they had received services, but did not indicate their satisfaction of the services received, which accounts for the gap between number of respondents and satisfaction.

# Maternal Health Systems Issues

## Methods

To understand systems issues associated with maternal health services through San Bernardino County, stakeholders were engaged through community gatherings as well as at the workgroup level.

## Systems Issues Related to Birthing Supports

Systems deficiencies identified specific to the birthing supports component of the Maternal Health Network include:

### Service Responsiveness and System Navigation

System stakeholders describe a system that doesn't adequately support a family as they enter the maternal health birthing supports system. They described a system that doesn't sufficiently listen to families regarding their concerns and desires. They also identified the need for navigational supports to help families understand the resources that are available and how to access them.

### Social Determinants of Health

Many social determinants of health were identified as impacting maternal and neonatal outcomes for families in San Bernardino County. These include poverty, access to healthcare, transportation, and cultural or language barriers. System stakeholders describe a system that does not often accommodate for the acute needs of families facing these social determinants of health, highlighting specifically barriers families who are unable to afford childcare face when entering the system.

### Lack of Coordinated Care

Stakeholders identified a lack of coordination amongst service providers making continuity of care difficult and duplication of efforts likely.

### Underutilization of Midwives and Doulas

Stakeholders identified that there is a general lack of knowledge or understanding of the benefits and qualifications held by midwives and doulas. Additionally, they described a system in which hospitals, midwives and doulas do not work in concert with one another to comprehensively serve families throughout the birthing process.

Beyond identifying system deficiencies, stakeholders also identified system strengths and areas where the service sector was adapting to meet the needs of families in San Bernardino County.

### Maternal Health Transports

In areas where there are no labor and delivery resources, hospitals are providing maternal health transports to support mother and infant health.

### IEHP Transportation Supports

IEHP provides transportation services to support access to care for their members.

### Doula Access Pilot Project

Inland Empire Health Plan is currently piloting a doula project to support expanded access to this birthing supports resource.

## Summary

### Strengths

San Bernardino County families have access to a variety of resources to support their birthing and delivery needs. Some strengths within this particular service sector of the maternal health system include:

- Families are insured and are often accessing prenatal care within their first trimester.
- Innovations such as maternal health transports and expanded access to doula resources are taking place.
- Most families (surveyed) were satisfied with the birthing and delivery supports they received from hospitals, birthing centers, and in home delivery settings.

### Improvements

Some improvements particular to the birthing supports service sector of the maternal health system include:

- Statewide data reveals that some families continue to struggle to get the support they need following the birth of a child. Specific racial/ethnic groups and individuals who are on Medi-Cal are more at risk for not getting the post-partum services and support needed.
- Some families don't have information about or access to all of the birthing support services needed. Midwives and doulas are underutilized and are not always partnered with by other parts of the system (hospitals and health plans).
- Families (surveyed) indicated that there is a need to provide additional information about all delivery methods available.

## Opportunities

Opportunities identified include:

**Improved access to and coordination between hospitals, health plans, midwives and doulas.**

**Establishment of a systems navigator would support improved access to services for consumers and improved service delivery for providers (through offering best practice information and training).**

**Provision of additional information to families regarding all delivery options available to them.**