



For Immediate Release

CHEER Receives \$750,000 W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant to Integrate Doulas into Mississippi Maternity Care Teams

The new initiative aims to improve maternal health outcomes, promote racial equity, and build a sustainable model for doula care in hospitals across the state.

Boston, MA – November 2025 – The Center for Health Equity, Education, and Research (CHEER) at Boston Medical Center has been awarded a three-year, \$750,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) to develop a hospital-based model for integrating doulas into maternity care teams in Mississippi. The project builds on the success of CHEER's Mississippi CHAMPS (Communities and Hospitals Advancing Maternity Practices) program, which has significantly improved maternal and infant health outcomes across the state since 2014.

With this new funding, CHAMPS will work in partnership with community doulas, hospitals, and leaders in maternal-child health equity — including Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere (ROSE), a nationally recognized nonprofit that promotes breastfeeding among Black families — to design a sustainable, community-informed model for doula integration. The project will emphasize racial equity, institutional collaboration, and systems change, while making the case for Medicaid and private insurance coverage for doula care.

“CHAMPS has worked with Mississippi maternity hospitals for over ten years, implementing evidence-based maternity care practices and increasing breastfeeding rates while decreasing racial disparities,” said Laura Burnham, MPH, Associate Director of CHEER and CHAMPS. “With over 90% of the births in the state now happening in Baby-Friendly designated hospitals, we are looking for innovative ways to further improve care, and integrating doulas into maternity care teams is the next natural step for us.”

Research shows doulas improve breastfeeding rates, reduce cesarean births and pain medication use, enhance respectful care, and reduce racial disparities in maternal health. Yet doulas are underutilized in Mississippi hospitals, and Medicaid in the state does not reimburse for doula services. In contrast, 46 states and Washington, D.C. have taken steps toward Medicaid coverage for doula care, and 24 are actively reimbursing, with Vermont, Arkansas, Utah, Louisiana, and Montana passing laws in 2025 to expand access.

Over the next three years, CHAMPS will conduct statewide assessments of both doula care and hospital readiness to integrate doulas into maternity teams; enroll pilot hospitals to implement sustainable doula integration policies and protocols; provide training for doulas on breastfeeding and evidence-based maternity care practices; and collect breastfeeding and maternity care data to measure impact and demonstrate the value of doula integration.

CHEER's CHAMPS program has a proven record of reducing disparities and advancing equity in maternity care. Since its launch in Mississippi, the number of Baby-Friendly designated hospitals has increased from zero to 30, breastfeeding rates have risen, and racial gaps in breastfeeding have narrowed. This new initiative will expand that impact by creating a replicable hospital-based model for doula integration that fosters collaboration between medical staff and community birth workers, demonstrates improvements in maternal health outcomes and patient experience, and lays the groundwork for meaningful insurance policy coverage.

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About CHEER

The Center for Health Equity, Education, and Research (CHEER) at Boston Medical Center and the





Center for Health Equity, Education, & Research

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Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine is a world-class center for maternal-child health advocacy, training, and research. CHEER is dedicated to advancing health equity through collaboration with community-based partners and providing technical assistance, training, evaluation, and inspiration. <https://cheerequity.org/>

About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal innovator and entrepreneur Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work, and life.

The Kellogg Foundation is based in Battle Creek, Michigan, and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes. Special attention is paid to priority places where there are high concentrations of poverty and where children face significant barriers to success. WKKF priority places in the U.S. are in Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, and New Orleans; and internationally, are in Mexico and Haiti. For more information, visit www.wkkf.org.

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