

Community-Based Solutions to Support Maternal Health, Parental Well-Being, and Reduce Social Isolation *Workshop & Training*

January 22nd, 2026

9 am - 12 pm via Zoom

[Please click here](#) to register.

CME & CHES credits will be available.

About This Event:

This workshop training will feature innovative and community-centered partnerships across Maine that are working to bridge service gaps and improve family, maternal, and child health outcomes. The focus of the presentations will be on reducing social isolation, including in rural and underserved communities. Together, these examples will illustrate how Maine is weaving together policy, peer support, and technological innovation to strengthen family wellness across the state.

The *Maine Doula Coalition* and *Maine Women's Lobby* underscore how doula and childbirth education services foster social support, reduce isolation, and improve maternal mental health, with doulas serving as vital connectors in rural communities. The *Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition* spotlights how parent support groups build community resilience, improve parental confidence, enable peer relationships, foster long-term mutual support, and reduce loneliness. *Maine Family Planning* shares about their pilot of the Mammha smartphone app and how it improves access to perinatal mental health care and support. The app integrates screening, SMS check-ins, peer support, mindfulness tools, and telehealth counseling, delivering critical care via digital platforms.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand gaps in perinatal and maternal healthcare by exploring how doulas, childbirth education, and innovative community-based strategies can enhance social support and improve health outcomes.
2. Identify community-based strategies to reduce social isolation and boost confidence among new parents, and outline steps to replicate or support similar models.
3. Understand the risks of isolation, poverty, and limited access to health care faced by perinatal individuals in rural Maine, and their relationship to a successful smartphone-based support app pilot.

Agenda:

Time	Presentation	Presenter
9:00 - 9:03 am	<i>Introduction</i>	
9:03 - 9:50 am	Community-Based Solutions to the Maternal Health Crisis: Doulas Improving Social Support for Birthing People	Maine Doula Coalition & Maine Women's Lobby
9:50 - 10:37 am	From Isolation to Empowerment: How New Parent Support Groups Build Community and Confidence in Maine	Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition
10:37 - 10:45 am	<i>Break</i>	
10:45 - 11:30 am	Using Technology to Bridge The Gap and Provide Critical Perinatal Mental Health Support	Maine Family Planning: Mammha
11:30 am - 12:00 pm	<i>Panel Discussion/Q&A</i>	MPHA Moderator: Mary Butler-Fleming

Moderator: Mary Butler-Fleming, Community Care Partnership of Maine

- Mary serves as Chief Operating Officer of Community Care Partnership of Maine, where she oversees operations, human resources, and compliance for a 25-member team supporting non-profit healthcare organizations across the state. As the mother of two young children—a one- and three-year-old—Mary brings both professional and deeply personal perspectives to the conversation. Having spent much of the past five years navigating pregnancy, postpartum life, and breastfeeding while working full-time, she is committed to advancing both community-based and workplace solutions that improve maternal health and parental well-being, and promote social connectedness.

Presentation Information:

Community-Based Solutions to the Maternal Health Crisis: Doulas Improving Social Support for Birthing People*Maine Women's Lobby & Maine Doula Coalition*

9:05 - 9:50 am

- **Sarah Tewhey, Maine Doula Coalition**
 - Sarah Tewhey is the Co-Director of the Maine Doula Coalition and has been a doula on Mount Desert Island since 2013.
- **LeAnne Dunham, Maine Doula Coalition**

- LeAnne Dunham is a member of the Maine Doula Coalition, doula, and childbirth educator from downeast Maine.
- **Lily James, *Maine Women's Lobby***
 - Lily James serves as Advocacy Coordinator for the Maine Women's Lobby, advocating on a wide range of gender justice policy including maternal healthcare access.

Maine faces complex maternal health challenges. The combination of decreasing access to perinatal healthcare and limited community support services is contributing to growing inequities in maternal and infant health outcomes. Social support during pregnancy and postpartum are proven protective factors for maternal mental health. One way to increase social support during pregnancy is through relationship-centered, community-based care – specifically, through access to doulas. Doulas are trained, non-medical caregivers who offer continuous emotional, physical, and informational support. By building trusting relationships and initiating group-based connections, doulas often serve as bridges to stronger community networks. In rural areas, they also help fill critical service gaps.

New parent groups reduce social isolation, improve health outcomes, and decrease maternal mortality, but community-based resources, especially in rural Maine are becoming increasingly rare. This presentation will discuss the collaborative policy and systems change efforts currently underway to expand access to doula care and explore Downeast Maine's only in-person childbirth education program as an example of how to promote effective, community-centered perinatal social support among underserved populations in Maine.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the challenges and gaps in the perinatal and maternal healthcare landscape in Maine.
2. Identify the role of doulas and childbirth education in providing social support that improves maternal and infant health outcomes, particularly in rural and underserved communities.
3. Encourage participants to think creatively about how to increase opportunities for perinatal social support in local communities.

From Isolation to Empowerment: How New Parent Support Groups Build Community and Confidence in Maine

Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition

9:50 - 10:37 am

- **Moderator: Kara Kaikini, *Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition***
 - Kara Kaikini, an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant and Executive Director of the Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition, is a strong believer in the

power of group support, especially during the most vulnerable period of new parenthood.

- **Lulu Churchill**, *Nature's Hand Maine*
 - Lulu Churchill (Nature's Hand) is a CLC and certified doula who tends new and evolving families out of Maine's Midcoast and runs a bi-monthly infant feeding support group called the Midcoast Nursing Circle.
- **Sarah Hand**, *Bangor Public Health*
 - Sarah Hand, RN, IBCLC, PMH-C, is the founder and creator of Milk & Cookies - Bangor's Postpartum & Breastfeeding Support Group, which just celebrated 2 years in December and was started to meet a need Sarah saw was not being met in her community.
- **Emily Eastman**, *MaineHealth Center for Health Improvement*
 - Emily Eastman is the Healthy Eating Active Living Coordinator for Healthy Oxford Hills at MaineHealth Stephens Hospital and a lead facilitator for Bumps and Babies.
- **Abby Pitts**, *Birth Roots*
 - Abby Pitts is a private practice IBCLC and the Program Director for Birth Roots in Portland. She has been facilitating both prenatal and postnatal classes for the past five years.

Social isolation among new parents is a significant but often overlooked public health issue, with research showing strong links between postpartum loneliness and increased risk of depression, anxiety, and poor health outcomes for both caregivers and infants. In Maine, a growing network of community-based parent support groups is addressing this crisis by offering welcoming, low-barrier spaces where new parents can connect, learn, and grow together.

This panel brings together four experienced parent group facilitators from Portland, Camden, Norway, and Bangor—representing urban, coastal, and rural communities—to explore how local groups are reducing loneliness and building community resilience. The conversation will center on how these peer-centered groups foster emotional connection, confidence in parenting, and access to resources like lactation support, early parenting guidance, and mental health care. Panelists will share insights into what makes these groups successful, how they adapt to meet local needs, and what it takes to sustain them—including partnerships, space, and inclusive facilitation.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify at least three strategies used by community-based parent support groups in Maine to reduce social isolation and build confidence among new parents.
2. Describe two actionable steps I can take to replicate or support new parent group models in my own communities or organizations.

Using Technology to Bridge The Gap and Provide Critical Perinatal Mental Health Support

Maine Family Planning: Mammha

10:45 - 11:30 am

- **Mathew Scease, Maine Family Planning**
- **Someone from Mammha leadership**

Many pregnant and postpartum parents in rural Maine face profound challenges when it comes to accessing perinatal mental health support. The barriers include transportation, no access to providers, low income, lack of health insurance, and the closure of maternal health services in rural areas. Maine's rural counties demonstrate poor health outcomes and high rates of postpartum depression and anxiety. A partnership between Maine Family Planning WIC and smartphone app Mammha, the first pilot of its kind in the country, is providing vital support through innovative technology, and it's working! Participants are screened for postpartum depression during their WIC appointments. If the participant screens negative, they receive interval check-ins for the first year postpartum. If the patient screens positive, they receive more frequent SMS text check-ins and connections to peer support specialists who have received maternal mental health training from Postpartum Support International. This session will provide more information about this new tool and how it can be adopted in additional practices and communities.

Learning Objectives:

1. To educate participants about the dangers and impacts of isolation, poverty and lack of access to health care services, especially for mental health, faced by perinatal persons in rural Maine.
2. To inform participants about a new smart phone-based application to support perinatal persons and their families and describe its success as a pilot project in Hancock, Washington, and Aroostook counties.