

# How to become a licensed midwife



**A Guide for North Alabama from the  
Alabama Cohosh Collaborative**



# What is a midwife?



**A midwife is a healthcare professional who specializes in providing care and support during pregnancy, childbirth, the postpartum period; sexual and reproductive health; and family planning services.** Some midwives also provide gynecological and

primary care from adolescence and throughout the elderly lifespan. Midwifery care can take place at home, in a birth center, or in a hospital.

The midwifery model of care is based on the understanding that pregnancy and birth are normal processes of the human body. Midwives aim to support these processes, rather than control and manage them. Midwives are less likely to use technological interventions, which can cause a cascade of medical issues, which then create the need to manage the birthing process with more intervention. Midwifery care also includes a focus on the experience and education of the birthing person and their family.

Alabama is in a maternity care crisis, and increasing the number of midwives in our state is a part of creating a healthy reproductive care workforce. Over a third of our counties are maternal health care deserts, with no maternal health care providers. Almost 20% of birthing people in Alabama receive inadequate prenatal care.<sup>1</sup> The people of Alabama deserve high quality care, and they deserve to have the option to choose a care provider that is right for them.

## About this guide

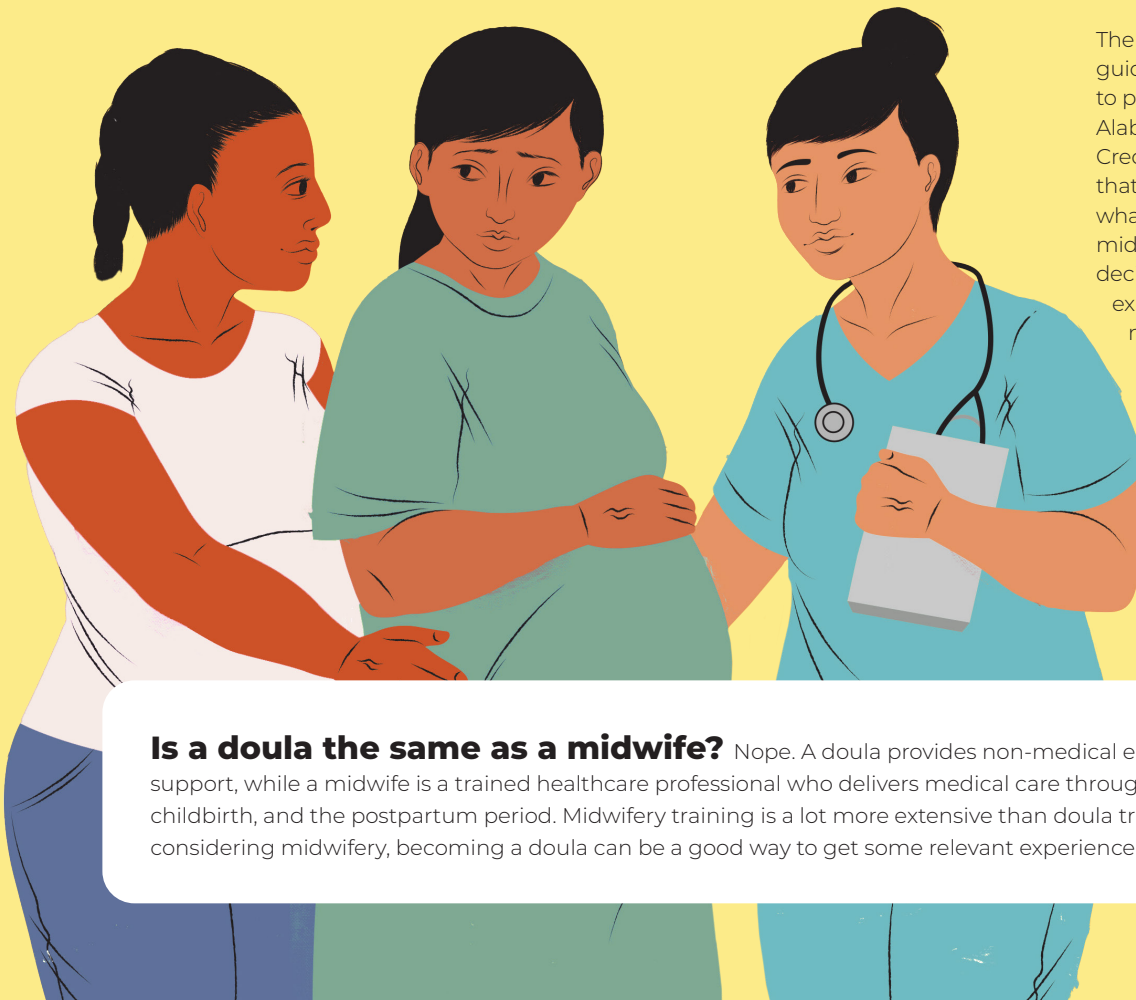
**Alabama has a rich history of midwifery and we need more midwives in our future.**

In many countries, the majority of births are attended by midwives rather than doctors. Until the mid-twentieth century, this was also the case in Alabama. Most births in Alabama were attended by midwives and most of those midwives were Black women. In the 1940s white doctors in Alabama initiated targeted efforts aimed at convincing white women to avoid having Black midwives attend their births and to birth in hospitals instead. In 1976 the state essentially outlawed midwifery. No midwives were licensed until 2019, after new legislation was passed.

The credentials described in this guide enable you to gain a license to practice midwifery in the state of Alabama in the twenty-first century. Credentials and licensure are tools that can help the public understand what they can expect from a midwife, and that can help midwives decide what kind of education and experience they need to practice midwifery and to build a career.

But remember—no state or institution owns the wisdom of midwifery. Midwifery is an ancient human practice, and the wisdom of midwives has been and continues to be passed down in thousands of ways.

**Is a doula the same as a midwife?** Nope. A doula provides non-medical emotional and physical support, while a midwife is a trained healthcare professional who delivers medical care throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. Midwifery training is a lot more extensive than doula training. If you're considering midwifery, becoming a doula can be a good way to get some relevant experience.



**There are two distinct routes to licensure as a midwife in Alabama. One is to become a certified professional midwife (CPMs) and the other is to become a Certified Nurse Midwife (CNMs).**

# CNMS and CPMs— what's the difference?

## Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs)

- \* CNMs are Registered Nurses (RNs) with graduate level midwifery training that comes from a university. Sometimes they are also called nurse midwives.
- \* In Alabama they are licensed to attend hospital and birth center births, and work in collaboration with a doctor. In Alabama, CNMs are not licensed to attend home births.
- \* CNM education includes experience with and education on pregnancy and childbirth, but it also includes broad experience in whole-person wellness. CNMs offer a range of health services beyond pregnancy and childbirth such as gynecological, fertility, menopause, and family planning care.

## Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs)

- \* CPMs are professional independent midwifery practitioners.
- \* CPMs can practice in community birth settings like homes and birth centers. CPMs often provide prenatal care in office settings. CPMs cannot provide care in hospitals in Alabama.
- \* CPMs' education is very focused on normal pregnancy and facilitating unmedicated vaginal childbirth. In Alabama, CPMs cannot provide well person care beyond the postpartum period.
- \* There are some restrictions on which births CPMs can attend. For example, CPMs are not licensed to attend births for people who have previously had a c-section, who are having twins or multiples, or who are having a breech birth.



There is a specific pathway for nurse-midwives to become CPMs in Alabama without having to complete all the same steps as someone who was new to midwifery. There is not an equivalent path for CPMs to become nurse-midwives.



# Midwifery education, training, and certification

## Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) Education Path:

- \* CNMs are certified by the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB) and licensed by the state board of nursing in combination with the state medical board.
- \* The CNM education path involves obtaining a master's or doctoral degree in nursing from a college or university. CNMs are advanced nurse practitioners with specialized training in midwifery.
- \* Most CNM programs require that you already have a bachelor's degree in nursing and be licensed before you enroll in the program. Some schools do offer "direct-entry" programs designed for students with a non-nursing bachelor's degree.
- \* Typically, CNM programs include 40-60 semester credits of didactic classroom study (typically takes 2.5 to 3 years) and at least 1000 hours of clinical training that includes attending births, maternity care, gynecologic care, and newborn care. After completing the program, you then have to pass the American Midwifery Certification Board exam, become licensed by the state as a registered nurse and apply for Certified Nurse Midwife licensure.
- \* After becoming a licensed CNM, there are continuing education requirements to maintain your license and certification.
- \* The University of Alabama at Birmingham opened its nurse-midwifery program in 2022; it's the only in-state nurse-midwifery program. Many schools that are not in Alabama offer distance education options.
- \* Tuition varies between colleges and universities.

## Certified Professional Midwife (CPM):

- \* CPMs are credentialed by the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM). There are two paths to gaining this credential: Attend a MEAC accredited midwifery school or completing what NARM calls the Portfolio Evaluation Process (PEP) and a bridge program.
- \* Both paths require a combination of learning from books and teachers (they call this didactic experience) and learning from experiences like attending births and observing an experienced care provider. (they call this clinical experience).
- \* Both paths require that a lot of your hands-on learning be completed under the supervision of preceptors. This involves observing and attending a set number of births, prenatal exams, newborn exams, and postpartum exams.
- \* NARM requires that the clinical component of the educational process must be at least two years in duration and include a minimum of 55 births.
- \* Both paths require that you have a high school diploma and that you pass the NARM Exam.
- \* Once you become a CPM, you still have to obtain a license to practice in the state of Alabama.

# Here's where the CPM paths are different

## If you enroll in a MEAC Accredited Midwifery School

Each school will have its own admission and course requirements. Many of these schools offer either a bachelor's, associate's, or master's degree in midwifery.

Coursework and clinicals typically takes a minimum of three years, but many students take 4+ years to complete their training.

The school will help you select preceptors and facilitate your relationship with them.

Tuition required to complete your course of study MEAC Accredited school ranges between \$20,000 and \$40,000 per year. Financial aid is available for most programs.

As of 2024, there are no MEAC accredited schools in Alabama, but many schools offer distance education with the option to complete your clinicals under the supervision of a preceptor in your area.

## If you complete the Portfolio Evaluation Process (PEP program)

The PEP program is a self-guided apprenticeship model using a guided document from NARM.

Completing this process requires that you find a preceptor or preceptors who will take you on as an apprentice and document your own learning and experiences. Your preceptors will have to sign off on your experiences.

You might still choose to take classes or enroll in a non-MEAC- accredited midwifery program.

After completing the required clinical experiences, you'll sit for the NARM exam and then submit all of your materials to NARM to apply for certification.

After becoming a CPM through PEP, you will have to complete the Midwifery Bridge Certificate to obtain a license to practice in Alabama. This is a certification administered by NARM that includes 50 continuing education credits.

## What is a preceptor?

**There is a long history of learning the craft of midwifery through an apprenticeship.**

A preceptor is an experienced nursing/ midwifery professional who takes on a midwifery student as an apprentice. The preceptor teaches, supervises and serves as a role model for a student.

Generally, students work with two to three preceptors over years of their education. Preceptors have to have a certain level of experience.

Some preceptors are willing to take on the work of training a student in exchange for the help they receive from the student. Some preceptors may charge the student a fee to compensate for the time and work it takes to precept.

Finding a preceptor in your area who has the capacity to take on an apprentice can be one of the most challenging parts of becoming a midwife in Alabama. You can find a list of preceptors on the Alabama Midwives' Alliance website. A good place to start is contacting midwives in your area to ask if they are precepting and currently taking students.



There is a different path to licensure for midwives who are already licensed in another state.

## Midwives and money:

# Once you become a midwife, can you make a living?



**CNMs:** For the most part, CNMs work for hospitals and are paid a salary. They have set hours and call schedules, have benefits, and things like billing and insurance are covered by hospital staff.

We couldn't find clear data on how much nurse-midwives make on average in Alabama, but according to a 2022 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, CNM salaries in the US ranged from \$78,000 to \$171,000, with an average salary of \$122,000.

**CPMs:** For the most part, CPMs operate their own business to attend home births. They decide how many clients to take on and they bill clients directly for a set fee. CPMs are responsible for their own billing, tax filing, insurance, benefits, credentialing fees, travel, medical supplies and everything else associated with their practice.

This fee typically includes all prenatal care, the birth, and postpartum/newborn care, and ranges from \$4,000-\$10,000, with most falling in the \$5,000-\$7,000 range. Some CPMs may offer a sliding scale fee based on client needs.

In Alabama, CPMs cannot get paid by insurance for prenatal care or births. Private insurance or healthshare clients may be able to be reimbursed, in full or in part, for their midwifery care. Medicaid does not pay for CPM care.

Rather than working set hours, CPMs will often stay on call to attend the birth of a specific client. That means that the number of births a midwife can attend in a year are limited. When a CPM is on call for a specific birth, they must be able to answer at any given time.

CPMs are entrepreneurs and business training is an important part of CPM training.



## National Midwifery Organization Acronyms

### **NARM:**

North American  
Registry of Midwives

### **MEAC:**

Midwifery Education  
Accreditation Council

### **ACOG:**

American College  
of Obstetricians and  
Gynecologists

### **AMCB:**

American Midwifery  
Certification Board

### **NACPM:**

National Association of  
Certified Professional  
Midwives

### **ACNM:**

American College of  
Nurse Midwives

### **ACME:**

Accreditation Commission  
for Midwifery Education

### **ICM:**

International Confederation  
of Midwives

# Resources

## Local/Regional Resources and Organizations:

- **Alabama Midwives Alliance (ALMA):** a not-for-profit organization which represents Alabama's midwives who work in out-of-hospital settings. Maintains a partial list of registered midwives and preceptors.
- **Alabama State Board of Midwives (ASBM):** a licensing and regulatory agency established to enforce the rules and regulations overseeing licensed midwifery.
- **Alabama Birth Coalition (ABC):** an advocacy organization focused on access to midwifery care, public education on maternity care options, and communication between midwives and other health care professionals.
- **Alabama Cohosh Collaborative:** ACC is a reproductive justice organization. Part of ACC's strategy to meet their mission is to nurture and grow a sustainable community of reproductive care workers guided by principles of compassion, justice, and personal sovereignty.
- **Yellowhammer Fund:** Yellowhammer Fund is a reproductive justice organization dedicated to ensuring all people have the ability to decide when and how to build their families, regardless of race, income, location, age, gender, sexuality, disability, documentation status or number of children

## Freestanding Birth Centers:

A birth center is a healthcare facility for childbirth where care is provided in the midwifery and wellness model. The birth center is freestanding and not a hospital. Birth centers can be important resources for midwifery students as places to learn, observe births, and practice skills.

- **Alabama Birth Center**, Madison County, AL
- **Oasis Birth Center**, Jefferson County, AL
- **The Birth Sanctuary**, Sumter County, AL
- **The Farm Midwifery Center**, Summertown, TN

## Resources for Black Midwives

- **Black Mamas Matter Alliance:** a Black women-led cross-sectoral alliance that centers Black mamas and birthing people to advocate, drive research, build power, and shift culture for Black maternal health, rights, and justice.
- **National Black Midwives Alliance:** works to establish a representative voice at the national level that organizes, advocates, and brings visibility to the issues impacting Black midwives and the communities they serve.
- **National Association to Advance Black Birth:** A primary goal of NAABB is to equip Black midwives with the practical tools and education they need to improve outcomes for Black women and birthing people.
- **Black Midwifery Collective:** BMC aims to revolutionize midwifery models of care, by increasing the racial diversity of Community Midwives to combat obstetric racism, and dismantle institutionalized birth practices.



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