

FAQ - Licensed Midwifery in Washington State (2019)

What is the legal status of licensed midwifery in Washington State?

- Licensed midwives (LMs) are regulated under RCW 18.50.

How are licensed midwives educated?

- All students complete rigorous theoretical instruction as well as extensive supervised clinical experiences in all aspects of midwifery care.
- LMs must attend an accredited three-year midwifery education program or the equivalent. Historically, there were only two programs approved by the state of Washington: Birthingway College of Midwifery and the Midwifery Department at Bastyr University (formerly the Seattle Midwifery School). In 2014, Washington State began to recognize several other accredited midwifery programs. Standards for education in these programs are consistent with those established by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and the International Confederation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) and exceed the requirements for certification by the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM). Washington LMs are required to attend a minimum of 100 births under supervision in the course of their clinical training.

What services can licensed midwives provide?

- LMs provide care during the normal childbearing cycle. They consult with physicians if complications arise and refer clients to physicians and other healthcare providers as appropriate. The midwives' scope of practice includes:
 - Prenatal care
 - Education and counseling regarding pregnancy, birth and infant care
 - Continuous support during labor
 - Delivery of the baby
 - Care of the newborn up to two weeks
 - Postpartum care of the mother
 - Family planning services

How do licensed midwives practice?

- LMs typically attend births in freestanding birth centers or in home settings. LMs are licensed to perform all of the procedures that may be necessary during the course of normal pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum/newborn period, including the administration of selected medications.
- LMs may practice independently or in a group with other midwives, physicians, and other health care providers. Should a case deviate from normal, a licensed midwife consults with a qualified physician and makes appropriate referrals. In an emergency, a midwife is trained and equipped to carry out life-saving measures.

Do medical insurance plans cover midwifery care?

- Most private insurance plans do reimburse for midwifery care, but coverage is not universal. In Washington State, Medicaid covers licensed midwifery care.

Can licensed midwives obtain malpractice insurance?

- The Midwifery and Birthing Center Professional Liability Insurance Joint Underwriting Association is a non-profit licensed insurance provider that insures LMs in Washington State. The insurance covers LMs attending births in state-licensed freestanding birth centers and homes. The JUA was established in 1994 based on Chapter 48.87 RCW.
- There is also one out-of-state liability carrier that provides malpractice insurance for some of the licensed midwives in the state.

How prevalent is licensed midwifery practice in Washington?

- The number of births attended by Washington State LMs has been increasing steadily since 2005¹ and the demand for community-based birth is growing.
- There are currently about 175 licensed midwives in WA State. By maintaining the \$525 cap on our licensing fee since 2008, the number of LMs practicing in the state has increased by over 40%.
- Between 2005 and 2015, the number of LM-attended births in WA increased by 81%, from 1,441 to 2,734. In 2005, LMs attended 1.7% of the births in WA; in 2015, 3.1%.
- In 2005, 771 births took place in licensed freestanding birth centers in WA. In 2015, that number was 1,357—an increase of 63%.

Is midwifery care cost effective?

- Data from the WA State HCA (2016) shows that licensed midwifery care leads to lower cesarean birth rates and reduced costs when compared to hospital-based care of low-risk women.² This results in savings to the State of Washington of \$1.9 million annually.
- According to a 2018 report from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services on the Strong Start Study, “Women who received prenatal care in Birth Centers had better birth outcomes and lower costs relative to similar Medicaid beneficiaries not enrolled in Strong Start. In particular, rates of preterm birth, low birthweight, and cesarean section were lower among Birth Center participants, and costs were more than \$2,000 lower per mother-infant pair during birth and the following year.”³

What is the Midwives’ Association of Washington State?

- Founded in 1983, the Midwives’ Association of Washington State (MAWS), is the professional association representing the majority of the state’s licensed midwives. MAWS has established standards for midwifery practice, maintains a quality management program for peer review and incident review, provides continuing education opportunities, represents licensed midwifery on the Department of Health’s Perinatal Collaborative, and lobbies on behalf of various issues related to perinatal and infant health in the state.

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For more information, please contact:

Neva Gerke MAWS President, at (360) 561-0750
president@washingtonmidwives.org

or

Amber Ulvenes, MAWS Lobbyist, at (360) 280-0384
amber@ulvenesconsulting.com

or

Audrey Levine, MAWS Lobbyist, at (360) 701-9194
audrey.e.levine@gmail.com

¹ http://www.doh.wa.gov/portals/1/Documents/Pubs/950-153_PerinatalIndicatorsforWashingtonResidents.pdf

² https://www.washingtonmidwives.org/uploads/1/1/3/8/113879963/medicaid_cost_data_2016.ffs_and_mcos.pdf

³ https://www.washingtonmidwives.org/uploads/1/1/3/8/113879963/strong_findings_at_a_glance-nov2018.pdf