

Licensed Midwifery in Washington State Fact Sheet

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: Birthingway College of Midwifery and the Midwifery Department at Bastyr University (formerly the Seattle Midwifery School). Recently, Washington State has begun to recognize several accredited distance-learning 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.
- In addition, there is an out-of-state 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 2004 and the demand for community-based birth is growing rapidly.
- There are currently about 170 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 40%.
- Between 2004 and 2015, the number of LM-attended births in WA increased by more than 100%, from 1,274 to 2,734. In 2004, LMs attended 1.6% of the births in WA; In 2014, 3.1%.
- In 2004, 692 births took place in licensed freestanding birth centers in WA. In 2014, that number was 1,195, an increase of 72%.

Is midwifery care cost effective?

- Evidence has shown that midwifery care leads to fewer interventions, lower cesarean birth rates, and reduced costs when compared to physician care of low-risk women.
- According to a national study comparing costs for home births to hospital births, home births reduced costs by up to 76%.
- In 2007, an independently conducted cost-benefit analysis commissioned by the Washington State Department of Health indicated that **the state saved more than \$473,000 biennially just in avoidance costs to Medicaid due to the lower c-section rates associated with LM care.** When other costly hospital interventions are included in the equation, the **direct savings to the Medicaid system conferred by licensed midwives attending births at home and in freestanding birth centers are dramatically higher than this conservative estimate suggests.**

What is the Midwives' Association of Washington State?

- The Midwives' Association of Washington State (MAWS), founded in 1983, is the professional organization representing the state's licensed midwives. It 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 Advisory Committee, and lobbies for various issues related to maternal and child health in the state.

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