



# Doula Network *Australia*

19 March 2020

Doula Network Australia Inc. (DNA) is the national association for birth and postnatal doulas in Australia. We oppose the exclusion and restriction of doulas from healthcare services during infectious disease outbreaks, including that of COVID-19.

Doulas are professionals who provide essential support services to women during pregnancy, birth and postpartum. Removing women's doulas at a time when they are exceptionally vulnerable is dismissive of their needs and desires and [violates women's and babies' human rights](#) to life, health, privacy and equal treatment (doula support [decreases morbidity and improves outcomes for mothers and babies](#)). [Current CDC policy](#) notes that individuals essential for a patient's emotional well-being and care should be exempt from exclusion/restriction situations. Furthermore, [ACOG](#) and [AWHONN](#) recognise doulas as essential support people and, along with [RCOG](#), oppose restrictions on doulas being present during labour.

Throughout previous pandemics (SARS and H1N1) doulas were not restricted from providing labour support. [RANZCOG notes](#) that COVID-19 seems to hold less risks for pregnant women than influenza, and [preliminary research](#) suggests that children are less susceptible to severe effects of the disease. DNA has discussed with and supports our members to follow [WHO safe practices](#) to minimise the spread of disease including vigilant hand washing/sanitising, wearing PPE as necessary, practicing social distancing and self-isolating when unwell or after contact with carriers of disease.

Doulas respect, protect and promote the health and well-being of their clients. While we recognise the risks posed by the current health crisis, doulas also provide support prior to attendance at hospital, thus negating any effect that exclusion from hospitals would provide. Indeed, by supporting women at home until they require assistance, doulas help reduce the load on the healthcare system and the potential for COVID-19 transmission.

DNA encourages healthcare services who have implemented exclusion policies to revise these and welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively and flexibly with hospital maternity services for the benefit of birthing women and their families.

## **Endorsed by**

Professor Hannah Dahlen AM [\[Link\]](#)

Dr Christine Catling [\[Link\]](#)

Rhea Dempsey [\[Link\]](#)

[www.doulanetwork.org.au](http://www.doulanetwork.org.au)