

Overview: The postpartum period is a critical chapter in the maternal health journey, impacting a woman's¹ health, well-being, and overall experience. However, the postpartum period remains overlooked and overshadowed by the joy and challenges of pregnancy and the 40-week clinical journey. USofCare's 100 weeks framework offers a fuller picture of the maternal health journey by capturing the time leading up to pregnancy to one year postpartum and includes the highs, lows, stressors, barriers, and supports women experience.

Women tell us they need more support after their pregnancy and during the postpartum period, where they felt their care from health care providers severely diminished. Improving care during the postpartum period, when most maternal deaths occur, can reduce maternal mortality and morbidity; lay the foundation for better physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being for the mother; and improve the overall maternal health experience.

Her Experience:² The complex postpartum experience begins shortly after delivery, when she leaves the hospital or birthing center and while still experiencing a wave of emotions from that journey. She starts to feel a significant drop in care and support. The problem is that often women **do not receive enough information** on what to expect and where to go for resources from professional health care providers so they navigate this period by relying on themselves and sometimes their community. As a result, she feels overwhelmed, lost, and lonely during the postpartum period. She experiences **postpartum mental health struggles** but has little to no knowledge on how to cope or get help, and may fear repercussions if she reaches out to her health care professional. She identifies barriers to getting the care she needs - including her race or ethnicity, institutional and structural racism, **insurance coverage**, income, geographic location, and more - and the care she needs seems out of reach. For many women, this is the postpartum pregnancy experience - isolating, confusing, and stressful instead of joyful.

The Research:

- The postpartum period entails many physical, social, and psychological changes
- Nearly two-thirds (65.3%) of maternal deaths occur in the postpartum period
- Late maternal deaths (between six weeks and one year postpartum) were 3.5 times more likely among Black women than white women
- As many as 40% of women do not attend a postpartum visit
- Postpartum care rates are lower for Medicaid-insured individuals, rural residents, and people of racially minoritized groups

When you were pregnant they were supporting you to make sure you are fine, healthy, and good. Once the baby came it was [all about] the baby. 'How is the baby doing?' and not the mom. But I still felt that I needed that support.

– BLACK WOMAN, NORTHEAST

I would say the hospital discharge was unhelpful, I wasn't told to follow up with anyone. I was just sent home to figure it out on my own. I felt my situation was not enough for them to care.

– BLACK WOMAN, LOUISIANA



Bright Spots:

The following are a few of many bright spots programs that are addressing gaps during the postpartum period for women:

MAMATOTO VILLAGE

Mamatoto Village's Mothers Rising Home Visitation (MRHV) program provides racially diverse mothers in the Washington, D.C. area with comprehensive home visiting services during pregnancy and postpartum. Services include counseling, doula care, wellness coaching, parent education, lactation support, and more.

[learn more](#)

THE BLOOM COLLECTIVE

The Bloom Collective is a perinatal wellness center that provides classes and 1-1 consultations from preconception through postpartum. They offer virtual postpartum support groups, postpartum doula care, and lactation consultations to support mothers.

[learn more](#)

Please visit our [Maternal Health Resources Hub](#) to learn about more Bright Spots in maternal health.

I definitely think there's a lot of pain that nobody really explains to you. I mean, the doctors give you a very brief, 'You are going to be in pain.' Because again, nobody tells you, even at your 6 week appointment. They did ask you, 'How are you doing? How is the baby doing?' 'Okay, good, great,' and then that's basically the end of the appointment.

– HISPANIC WOMAN, MIDWEST

¹ We use the term "woman" and "women" throughout this piece because our maternal health listening research was conducted with people who self-identified as women.

² This section is based on two USofCare listening sessions: one with [women of color](#) and another specifically with [Black women](#), who shared their pregnancy and postpartum experiences.