

Executive Summary

United States of Care's [recent listening work](#) highlights that many U.S. women find postpartum support in the first year after delivery to be scarce, inconsistent, and insufficient. For millions of working women, employer benefits significantly determine the quality of the postpartum experience. Despite this, neither federal nor state regulations adequately address the postpartum needs of working women. The average U.S. employer provides only 10 weeks of paid leave, and in 2023, only 37% of employers with at least 500 employees offered at least one specialized benefit or resource designed to support women's family planning and maternal health. This alone does not guarantee the provision of postpartum-specific support; however, more comprehensive maternal health services are [associated](#) with more positive postpartum experiences. Expanding comprehensive employee benefits presents a promising opportunity to improve postpartum care, and employers have a unique role in shaping policies that support maternal health for their workforce.

Roadmap

Comprehensive benefits such as robust health care coverage, extended paid parental leave, lactation support, and child care assistance can alleviate many stressors faced by postpartum women, resulting in healthier families and more productive workplaces. As demand for better maternal health benefits grows, U.S. employers must recognize their critical role in addressing the postpartum needs of their workers. "Bright spots" in employer-sponsored maternal and postpartum care offer a look into a future where mothers can safely recover from the physical, emotional, and mental ups and downs of the postpartum experience and face a healthy return to work that, in the end, benefits their employers as well. By assessing the innovative maternal health benefits offered by a handful of leading industry employers, we can better understand the intersecting labor-health system and how employers can meaningfully invest in the long-term, holistic health and well-being of their postpartum employees.

¹ USofCare's listening research captures the perspectives of the participants who all self-identified as women and may not be generalizable to the overall pregnant and birthing population.

² Key components of comprehensive health coverage with services tailored to the postpartum period may include postpartum primary care follow-up visits, mental health screenings and counseling services, postpartum-specific physical therapy, continued, tailored care for chronic conditions after childbirth, home visits, and more.

Key Findings

United States of Care (USofCare) has identified several emerging benefits provided by standout employers that are associated with significant positive influences on the postpartum experience:

Benefits related to health care

- Comprehensive health coverage
- Mental health services
- Doula and midwife resources
- Family planning services

Benefits related to the work environment

- Paid parental leave
- Lactation resources
- Child care support
- Bereavement for pregnancy loss
- Disability leave

Employers who invest in benefits with comprehensive postpartum support yield many operational advantages:

- **Improved employee well-being and work culture:** Better benefits enhance the overall health and well-being of postpartum employees, facilitating smoother transitions back to work and influencing more positive work environments.
- **Higher productivity and retention:** Improved maternity benefits attract and retain talent, boost productivity, and reduce absenteeism and turnover.
- **Significant cost savings:** Enhanced maternal health services can lead to significant medical cost savings for both employers and employees.

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The gap in postpartum care

Over the past two years, United States of Care has engaged in a series of listening research projects to identify gaps in the maternal health experience and better understand how we can implement policy change to fill in these gaps. Women told us they needed more support after their pregnancy and during the postpartum period. In particular, women raised the lack of workplace support upon return. Re-entering the workforce after pregnancy, delivery, and birth is a significant transition that brings a complex array of emotions and experiences. Women directly connected their postpartum experience to the supportive, or stressful, environment of their workplace and supervisors. By understanding these intersecting elements of the perinatal and postpartum period, employers and organizations can better support new mothers, foster a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture, and improve postpartum care.

I thought about returning to work at 6 week[s] because people were like, “You can go back to work.” But I was scared to leave my child. I actually resigned from my position and my employer understood because it was my first child and I was nervous to leave her with anyone and to return to work seemed like it would have been traumatic for the both of us.

– BLACK WOMAN, CALIFORNIA

What we heard

- Many women felt pressured to return to work before they were ready due to financial constraints or limited leave policies, if any at all.
- Some women left their jobs due to a lack of flexibility in their work environment, to better support their babies, or for more recovery time.
- Women experience a wide range of emotions when returning to work.
 - Many felt anxiety and sadness about leaving their baby, coupled with guilt for not being present for important milestones.
 - Some women struggled with feelings of inadequacy and stress about balancing work and motherhood.
 - Other women felt relief and joy in resuming their professional roles and achieving a sense of normalcy.
- Employer support varied widely. Women who felt supported by their employers cited comprehensive paid leave policies, flexible work arrangements, supportive work environments for breastfeeding, and empathetic and accommodating management.

The current landscape

Building up from our listening-based findings, the trends unearthed through women sharing their postpartum experiences are reflected in emerging data regarding the links between birthing outcomes and the demands, stressors, and helping hands of a woman's employer. As USofCare explores what it means to have a healthy, positive pregnancy journey directly from women, it is critical to account for the benefits and support services that employers provide alongside the other fixtures that shape a woman's postpartum experiences and outcomes.

In 2023, approximately 60% of non-elderly U.S. residents relied on employer-sponsored health insurance as their primary source of care coverage. Concurrently, over half of U.S. mothers use private insurance to cover delivery costs. Though this does not only encompass private, employer-sponsored care, it highlights the support the average U.S. worker needs to address just one aspect of perinatal and postpartum care. Even with insurance, new parents face nearly \$3,500 in out-of-pocket costs. Additionally, the maternal health care landscape reaches far past a mother's delivery date.

The postpartum period marks a critical life course event for both a mother and her infant – a period through which the risk of serious maternal health complications rises. Unfortunately, postpartum care services are inconsistent due to a lack of federal policy guidance and standardized state benchmarks. Among wealthy nations, the U.S. has the highest rate of maternal mortality, which is defined as a death during pregnancy or up to a year afterward. Racial disparities are stark: Black women, in particular, are nearly three times more likely to die of a pregnancy-related cause than white women. Although nearly two-thirds of maternal deaths occur postpartum—up to one year after pregnancy, this time period remains overlooked and overshadowed by the joy and challenges of the 40-week clinical journey. Once the baby is born, the mother's care, support, and well-being become secondary.

It is not easy or simple to access adequate postpartum care. Up to 40% of mothers in the U.S.

miss their six-week postpartum OBGYN check up – and often, this service is the extent of the postpartum care a woman is provided. Employers, through more robust maternal health packages, can streamline access to care for pregnant and postpartum women who are already experiencing an unprecedented period of physical, emotional, and behavioral transition and potential isolation.

When it comes to employers, if they can actually just increase the length of maternity leave, that would be very helpful...Other countries have half a year. Here, we only get 3 months, if that...It is just another stressful situation having a job that [doesn't] understand – that is not understanding, that is not flexibility, that is not nurturing.

– BLACK WOMAN, SOUTHWEST

In this pocket of unspecified and variable maternal health protections, some U.S. employers are carving pathways forward for more explicit postpartum care through benefit and coverage packages that better recognize the comprehensive care needed in the days, weeks, and months after delivery. In 2023, 37% of employers with at least 500 employees reported providing at least one specialized benefit or resource focused on women's reproductive health, ranging from services for high-risk pregnancies and lactation consultation to care related to family planning, postpartum, and pregnancy loss. However, the nature and impact of these services in action remains relatively novel.

How employers benefit from offering better postpartum support

In 2023, average per-employee cost of employer-sponsored health insurance rose by 5.2%; increases were highest for medium-sized employers (50-499 employees), who reported a higher average per-employee cost for health insurance – \$16,464 compared to \$15,640 among large employers (500+). Where large employers can self-fund medical plans and avoid insurance company risk charges, smaller companies lack the resources to devote to health program management in the same way. However, despite financial constraints, smaller companies still have options through the highlighted benefit levers to meaningfully enhance postpartum care with more targeted strategies – including through more flexible work arrangements and affordable supplemental service partnerships that specialize in maternal health support.

I went back to work last week and it was an emotional situation... Before, you could only get 6 weeks of leave time. Now, they give you 12 weeks...they'll pay you for those 6 weeks but the other 6 weeks, you have to take your [vacation or sick] leave.


– BLACK WOMAN, SOUTH CAROLINA

Better maternal health and postpartum care services holistically enhance work environments for both employers and their employees. Since the pandemic shifted large swaths of workers to remote environments and further blurred the lines between work and life, demand for better maternal health benefits has increased across industries. Currently, there is dissonance between the perceptions of employers and the needs of their employees – according to NFP's 2024 Leave Management report, employers projected that 44% of their employees were unhappy with their maternity benefit offerings, when more than 50% of workers reported that they should receive better benefits.

By recognizing and working to close this gap, employers can:

- Better attract and retain crucial talent;
- Improve productivity;
- Reduce absenteeism; and
- Reduce the medical and business costs associated with adverse pregnancy and postpartum outcomes.

According to Maven, employer-sponsored maternal health care services that covered postpartum needs correlated to considerable medical cost savings and NICU reductions for both employers and employees. More specialized benefits, such as child care provisions, can deliver returns of up to 425% of their cost to U.S. companies. Employees with more extensive maternal health benefits report more positive experiences with the management of postpartum depression and anxiety and healthier, smoother transitions back to the work environment.



*The only challenges
I will say was
[traveling] back and
forth from work to
the appointment
because a lot of my
appointments were
during times when I
had to be at work.*

– BLACK WOMAN, CALIFORNIA

What employers can do

Employers can significantly influence the trajectory of a woman's postpartum experience by reevaluating their postpartum health care services and paid leave standards and considering other benefits that contribute to positive outcomes for women and their newborns. Few U.S. employers explicitly acknowledge postpartum-specific care and services in their benefit packages; however, more far-reaching maternal health, mental health, and fertility services illustrate the positive influence employers can wield to benefit both their postpartum employees' well-being and their operational productivity.

USofCare has identified a variety of potential benefit levers with positive impacts on the postpartum experience for employers to consider, ranging from those that influence the workplace environment to those that reflect investments in more traditional health care services. These benefits were defined through a review of the current landscape of maternal health benefits, and an analysis of proven drivers of both positive and negative postpartum outcomes identified through community listening research and literature review.

Health care benefits

Health care coverage focuses on how comprehensive employers' health care plans are when it comes to covering maternal and postpartum care. In USofCare's listening, a common reflection from postpartum women stressed that despite having employer-sponsored coverage, care remained expensive. The structure, affordability, and accessibility of an employers' health care package are critical to the advancement of more positive postpartum experiences. Maternal and postpartum mental health screenings, oral health services, and postpartum provider visits all serve as significant determinants of healthy postpartum outcomes and enable risk factors to be monitored earlier in the perinatal and postpartum period.

Family planning resources provide access to and education on diverse contraceptive methods, including fertility or sterilization procedures, implants, injections, oral contraceptives, intrauterine devices, and more. These services enable birthing women to achieve their personal reproductive goals related to pregnancy prevention, delay, and healthy birth spacing.

Doula and/or midwife services recognize the positive impact of more culturally-responsive, personalized care in the perinatal and postpartum experience. Though often used interchangeably and offering complementary care approaches, doulas and midwives play different roles in a women's reproductive journey. Doulas focus on the emotional and educational aspects of the birthing experience, while midwives can provide maternity medical care. These resources are grouped together in consideration of the positive emotional, physical, and informational support they provide to women throughout the entire reproductive experience.

Mental health services in tandem with appropriate and comprehensive treatment plans, support the mental, behavioral, and physical health of postpartum women and their newborns. Untreated maternal mental health issues cost the U.S. over \$14 billion annually. Employers can invest in postpartum mental health by providing Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), mental health hotline services, or partnering with supplemental services like Maven or BenefitBump that broadly support mental health care through therapy, personalized counseling, and other specialized services for expecting and new mothers.

Work environment benefits

Paid parental leave varies widely among U.S. employers in its categorization. [Federal protections](#) only require employers with more than 50 workers to offer 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year. [Only thirteen states and the District of Columbia](#) have passed paid leave mandates to improve on these federal guidelines. USofCare's assessment focuses on paid leave policies specifically dedicated to the preparation for and recovery from childbirth, without requiring employees to use their general vacation or paid time off accruals. Many employers combine short-term disability benefits with maternity leave offerings to cover more than the average 10 weeks of leave. Access to generous maternity leave is associated with improved [postpartum physical and mental health](#), reduced rates of [postpartum hospitalization](#), and positive [early childhood outcomes](#) for workers' infants.

Lactation support includes a range of breastfeeding resources that extend beyond the federal mandates of the [PUMP Act](#), which requires employers to provide postpartum workers with all necessary pumping breaks and a safe, private, and specifically-designated nursing space. Broader support can take the form of professional lactation consultation, breastfeeding education, the provision of proper nursing equipment, and breast milk delivery programs. Lactation-supportive workplaces [correlate](#) with reduced health care costs for working women, lower likelihood of long-term health ramifications for mothers and their babies, and decreased levels of workplace absenteeism.

Child care support encompasses the early childhood services a workplace may provide, including on-site child care and subsidies such as day care tuition reimbursement, family stipends, or backup support. These services positively impact the postpartum experience by alleviating stress and making the transition back to work smoother for more parents, particularly among those of [lower socioeconomic status](#). In recent years, ChildCare Aware has estimated that U.S. businesses lose [more than \\$4.4 billion](#) each year due to child care related absenteeism. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, employee absences can [decrease by as much as 30%](#) and turnover by 60% when employers provide child care services.

Bereavement for pregnancy loss acknowledges that not all pregnancies result in the live birth of a healthy infant. Women who experience pregnancy loss face a postpartum period that is often entirely overlooked. [Recent federal regulations](#) normalize the suboptimal offering of unpaid leave for pregnancy-related bereavement. Returning to work without sufficient, covered time for physical recovery can lead to [long-term physical and mental health challenges](#). Employers can have a profound effect on employee performance, productivity, and retention by investing in the holistic well-being of working women through the complex, traumatic, and [common experience](#) of pregnancy loss.

Disability leave addresses the variety of protections pregnant women can access through short-term disability benefits. Similar to how disability coverage can be used to extend postpartum leave, these benefits can also provide critical support to women experiencing severe maternal mental health issues.

Looking ahead

Employers play a critical role in shaping the postpartum experience for working women. In 2023, [76% of employed U.S. mothers](#) were in families maintained by mothers – starkly outlining the immense influence postpartum support has on the well-being and stability of entire families. Comprehensive benefits such as extended paid parental leave, lactation support, child care assistance, and robust health care coverage can alleviate many of the stressors faced by postpartum women. By investing in these benefits, employers can enhance the well-being of their employees, improve workplace culture, and facilitate healthy postpartum transitions, while also improving productivity, reducing absenteeism, and increasing retention. The demand for better maternal health benefits will continue to grow, and U.S. employers can play a critical role in drawing more care and attention to the postpartum needs of their workers.

³ This report approaches the parental leave category with a focus on benefits related to the physical, behavioral, and emotional postpartum period of the parent who directly experienced pregnancy and childbirth, because these policies range widely in their protection of birthing women's return-to-work experience. Paternity and other leave offerings for non-birthing partners are another notable driver in shaping postpartum health outcomes for birthing parents to be considered, but the ongoing, relative scarcity and brevity of these policies require further investigation to better understand how they impact working women's postpartum experiences.

As more employers begin to recognize this demand and ramp out different benefits tailored to maternal health care and family planning, we have begun to see how those supports — or lack thereof — play out in the postpartum lives of working women. To complement what we heard when we asked women to consider what support they needed in their ideal and personal postpartum journey, USofCare has identified innovative “bright spots” in employer-sponsored care and benefit packages.⁴ From lactation consultation to doula services; from paid parental leave policies to child care support — companies across the country are offering a glimpse into the potential power and positive impact of employer policies that directly support women’s holistic well-being through the postpartum period. This snapshot marries our listening research with women and landscape analysis conducted on working women’s postpartum challenges with efforts to actively support the postpartum experience. By focusing on these programs and practices, we can develop more tailored insight into the types of benefits and policies that can meaningfully enhance all women’s postpartum experience and transition back to work.

Gaps Identified through our Listening and Landscape Research

Inadequate lactation support

Many women struggle with breastfeeding continuation in ways that keeps them from achieving their lactation goals. For working women, lack of breastfeeding support resources and shorter leave periods can make navigating breastfeeding challenges more difficult. Up to six weeks postpartum, women – and particularly women with pre-existing chronic conditions – are at high risk of early breastfeeding cessation and additional co-occurring difficulties with milk production, latching, and other physiological discomfort. These challenges, when not properly addressed, can make the transition into motherhood more physically and emotionally stressful well before the return to work.

After giving birth my daughter went to the NICU so I didn't get to bond much until weeks later. She didn't latch so I exclusively pumped. I don't get much support because of the pandemic. Someone was supposed to come help with latching but never came.

– BLACK WOMAN, ILLINOIS

Bright Spots Improving Postpartum Care Outcomes and Experiences

Lactation consultant services

Goldman Sachs and Delta both provide employees with 24/7 access to remote lactation consultation.

Breastmilk delivery services

Capital One and PayPal offer covered services that ship breast milk to postpartum employees when they are traveling for work upon return to the office.

How do these services support postpartum women?

Breastfeeding stressors are among the leading factors influencing a woman’s decision not to return to work after childbirth. Lactation consultation involves personalized guidance by a certified specialist to address latching difficulties, low milk supply, pain management, early lactation cessation, and more. Access to lactation consultants is associated with higher rates of breastfeeding initiation and continuation alongside better postpartum education.

Breastmilk delivery services are far less common than lactation consultation; however, supplemental services such as Milk Stork are growing. The immediate-impact benefit of breastmilk delivery can help nursing mothers both before and during the transition back to work.



Gaps Identified through our Listening and Landscape Research

Insufficient child care

Women who lack affordable, high-quality child care miss health care appointments during the postpartum period, contributing to cascading risk trends of postpartum depression and distress for new mothers. Psychological stress caused by child care accessibility challenges is one of the most prominent predictors of maternal depression and other adverse behavioral outcomes during the postpartum period.

Bright Spots Improving Postpartum Care Outcomes and Experiences

On-site child care and child care stipends

Patagonia subsidizes on-site child care and provides child care stipends to employees that do not live near one of its care centers. Johnson & Johnson also subsidizes on-site child care and offers discounts to remote employees seeking care from Bright Horizons partners. Adobe provides family concierge services to develop time-saving personalized guidance and customized family care plans for employees using Bright Horizons benefits.

How do these services support postpartum women?

Access to reliable, affordable child care is crucial for working mothers during the postpartum period. On-site child care and child care stipends help reduce the financial burden and logistical challenges associated with finding and paying for quality child care. These benefits, including the safety net of backup child care options, enable mothers to focus on their transition back to work and personal well-being, reducing stress and enhancing their overall postpartum experience.

⁴The bright spots identified are by no means exhaustive. There are many employers growing their maternal health employee benefit packages, and this snapshot only highlights a sample based on publicly available data. Further, because this snapshot portrays publicly available data, USofCare cannot validate the efficacy of these benefits during internal implementation and administrative processes. These bright spots are promising indicators of maternal health employer support, but more research is required to understand how they impact the real-world experiences and environments of postpartum employees.

⁵Bright Horizons partners with businesses to design and provide care services to employees, including child care center access, back-up care for children and adults, elder care, educational advising, and other family support services. This report focuses on companies that partner with Bright Horizons specifically for infant and early childhood care.

Gaps Identified through our Listening and Landscape Research

Rushed return to work

Many women feel rushed when returning to work after their pregnancy. More than half of American women return to work less than 3 months after childbirth. Within this period, it is very common for women to experience lingering health issues, including fatigue, urinary problems, sleep deprivation, and back and pelvic pain. More restrictive maternity leave policies are linked to higher rates of postpartum depression. Length, wage replacement, and employment protection within leave policies all carry implications for a mother's physical and mental health during and after the postpartum period. A premature return to work is more likely to lead to short- and long-term health consequences, and increases the risk of hospital readmission during the postpartum period.

I thought about returning to work at six week[s] because people were like, “You can go back to work.” But I was scared to leave my child. I actually resigned from my position and my employer understood because it was my first child and I was nervous to leave her with anyone, and to return to work seemed like it would have been traumatic for the both of us.

– BLACK WOMAN, CALIFORNIA

The thing about the 12 weeks [of parental leave] is...that they’ll pay you for those six weeks but the other six weeks, you have to take your [vacation or sick] leave. If you don’t have that leave in the bank, you can’t use it.

– BLACK WOMAN, SOUTH CAROLINA

Bright Spots Improving Postpartum Care Outcomes and Experiences

Adequate paid parental leave

Netflix provides its employees with up to 52 weeks of full-pay parental leave, irrespective of tenure.

Flexible work arrangements

Maven Clinic offers flexible work scheduling upon return from 16-week full-pay leave and a 2-month new parent stipend. Philips offers eight weeks of paid maternity leave for all births, four weeks of paid parental leave for new mothers and fathers after birth or adoption, followed by a four-week parental transition at the conclusion of parental leave at part-time hours with full-time pay.

How do these services support postpartum women?

Every woman's pathway to a healthy, comfortable workforce re-entry is different. More flexible leave policies allow postpartum women to put their health and well-being before concerns about lost pay or employment security and have more autonomy in deciding how and when to return to work. Research suggests that extended paid leave policies improve maternal employment outcomes and wages with little to no financial burden on employers – in addition to serving as a significant protective factor in postpartum mental and physical health outcomes.

Gaps Identified through our Listening and Landscape Research

Lack of mental health investments

Decreased social support and mental health services are associated with increased risk of postpartum depression, anxiety, and impaired parent-infant bonding. Approximately one in seven women experience postpartum complications related to postpartum depression. When untreated, postpartum depression can influence postpartum checkup attendance, lead to premature breastfeeding cessation, and cause additional stressors related to baby bonding. Severe complications include higher rates of suicidality and rehospitalization during the postpartum period.

I wasn't told much. They just had me take the assessment and that was that. The survey mentioned that if I was feeling a way, to seek help. Other than that, didn't receive much else. No one called and checked on me or anything. The assessment was very black-and-white and was like what if I am feeling in between, they was just like answer what makes more sense. After that, I kind of just stopped asking questions. Only relying on a survey to determine your needs felt odd to me and un-human like approach.

– BLACK WOMAN, CALIFORNIA

Bright Spots Improving Postpartum Care Outcomes and Experiences

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Google offers employee assistance programs focused on mental health, onsite wellness centers, and access to supplemental online mental health services.

Counseling and mental health copay coverage

Patagonia covers 100% of employee mental health co-pays. Delta offers its employees 7-12 free counseling sessions per topic. Amazon offers 5 free sessions per topic.

Telehealth services

Walmart covers the cost of virtual urgent care, primary care, and mental health care services for its employees, ranging from online therapy and psychiatry to specialized clinical counseling.

How do these services support postpartum women?

Access to mental health services is crucial for addressing postpartum depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. By providing free or subsidized counseling sessions, employers help reduce financial barriers to seeking mental health care. Employee assistance programs and onsite wellness centers offer convenient access to support, while telehealth services extend more flexibility to those who may have time or mobility constraints in the first few weeks of the postpartum period. A 2023 survey found that among employers offering telemedicine services in their benefit packages, mental health concerns comprised 61% of employee encounters. These comprehensive mental health benefits contribute to the overall well-being of new mothers, supporting a smoother transition back to work and enhancing their long-term health.

⁶ Walmart's telemedicine services, provided through Doctor on Demand, explicitly acknowledge care for postpartum depression and anxiety, loss and miscarriage, and postpartum familial stressors.



Gaps Identified through our Listening and Landscape Research

Little acknowledgement of pregnancy loss

Women who do not leave the delivery room with a baby still experience the physical and emotional toll of the postpartum period, but with even less acknowledgement both from care providers and employers. Women who experience miscarriage can face weeks of vaginal bleeding, cramping, and other health effects comparable to the delivery of a healthy baby for several weeks after the loss – but leave and time off may not be provided. Pregnancy loss can also lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic grief that can last for several months, or longer. Less than one-quarter of employer bereavement policies offer time off for pregnancy loss, and full pay is not uniformly guaranteed when leave is provided.

Bright Spots Improving Postpartum Care Outcomes and Experiences

Paid leave for pregnancy loss

Goldman Sachs and Pinterest provide four weeks of paid leave to employees recovering from pregnancy loss. Deloitte and Bumble offer up to 15 days of compassionate leave for pregnancy loss, with possible extensions.

Some city governments are beginning to recognize pregnancy loss as well: Pittsburgh city employees receive fully paid bereavement leave during pregnancy loss and Boston city employees are entitled to the city's 12-week paid parental leave that would otherwise be triggered at childbirth.

How do these services support postpartum women?

Providing paid bereavement leave for pregnancy loss at any point during pregnancy acknowledges the emotional and physical impact of such experiences and offers postpartum women time to grieve and recover without the added stress of a quick return to work responsibilities. This compassionate approach helps foster a supportive workplace environment and demonstrates a commitment to employee well-being. Responsive psycho-social care and support play a significant role in helping women navigate pregnancy loss without minimizing the experience, and bereavement leave creates more room for this process.

Gaps Identified through our Listening and Landscape Research

Limited doula and midwife support

While rates of doula and midwife support and childbirth attendance have been on the rise throughout the 2010s, the vast majority of U.S. women do not receive their services. Because doula services are often provided outside of formal settings such as hospitals or designated birth centers, it is difficult to estimate their usage patterns at a national scale. However, a 2011-2022 survey projects that approximately 6% of U.S. births during the time period were attended by doulas. Further, certified midwives attended 8.7% of hospital births in 2019, and 56.6% of birth center births in 2017. Midwives in birth centers, in particular, are certified to provide a full range of maternity care services, with targeting investments into postpartum and newborn care in the birth 6-8 weeks after birth, and extending afterward.

Both doula and midwife services are linked to positive maternal health outcomes and lower rates of medical intervention during childbirth. Particularly for Black and Indigenous women, doula and midwife support has proven to be a protective factor in preempting postpartum complications that arise from patterns of structural racism and implicit bias in our health care system.

Bright Spots Improving Postpartum Care Outcomes and Experiences

Doula benefits

Microsoft incorporates doula services into its maternity bundle health coverage plan. CVS Health covers doula benefits up to \$1,200 per year for employees.

How do these services support postpartum women?

Doulas provide continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to women before and during childbirth, and throughout the postpartum period. Incorporating and covering doula services in health plans can improve birth outcomes, reduce the likelihood of complications, and enhance women's overall childbirth and postpartum experiences and care engagement habits. This support is particularly beneficial for first-time mothers and those with high-risk pregnancies, who also face more potential risks throughout the postpartum experience. Despite these benefits, there is still a relative scarcity in their prevalence among perinatal and postpartum women – one that could be supplemented by employer-sponsored benefits that make finding and affording a trained doula and/or midwife easier.

“We both were new parents so we both were just blind. My doula was very helpful and [we] would call or text her in the middle of the night or morning.”

– BLACK WOMAN, NEW JERSEY

Gaps Identified through our Listening and Landscape Research

Scarce family planning education

Awareness regarding methods of pregnancy prevention, delay, and birth spacing are critical during the postpartum period to ensure a woman has a healthy and positive recovery from pregnancy. Many working women in the U.S. lack comprehensive education about family planning, especially during the postpartum period. Healthcare providers often focus on immediate postpartum care, leaving gaps in information about contraception, fertility, and long-term reproductive health. This lack of guidance can make it difficult for women to make informed decisions about their family planning options and personal reproductive goals, particularly as they juggle the demands of returning to work.

“My doctor didn’t tell me much about postpartum. I remember he asked if I would breast feed and that was it. I googled everything else or asked the nurses in the hospital. At my visit he didn’t really ask much just if everything was going well.”

– BLACK WOMAN, NEW JERSEY

Bright Spots Improving Postpartum Care Outcomes and Experiences

Family planning support

Bumble offers employees a \$10,000 lifetime fertility benefit, giving workers access to Maven Fertility services including educational family planning support. Meta offers employees access to its supplemental application Cleo, which provides women with personalized support through fertility planning, recovery from child loss, and further guidance during pregnancy and infant care.

How do these services support postpartum women?

The intersection of employment and family planning brings unique challenges for every woman, and access to comprehensive education and resources can significantly impact an individual's perinatal and postpartum health and well-being in ways that also support an expecting or new mother's career trajectory. Family planning guidance during the postpartum period can help women navigate breastfeeding challenges, find the contraceptives that work best for them, and avoid other adverse side effects of the postpartum period. These resources can reduce postpartum stress and uncertainty, supporting better health outcomes and empowering employees to plan their families according to their personal needs and goals.

The role of employers in shaping mothers' postpartum experience cannot be understated. This “bright spots” snapshot offers a glimpse of the myriad of potential pathways forward through which employers can meaningfully enhance the lives of their postpartum employees. USofCare remains committed to advocating for better maternal health policies and supporting employers in adopting these best practices. By working together, we can create a more supportive and equitable environment for postpartum women. Our ongoing efforts to engage with communities, listen to their needs, and highlight successful employer initiatives are crucial steps towards achieving this goal. We hope this research prompts employers to consider innovative postpartum-focused benefits that both improve employee well-being and realize significant operational advantages in productivity, cost savings, and retention. We invite employers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to join us in this mission. By prioritizing comprehensive postpartum care, we can improve the lives of millions of working women and their families, ensuring that every woman has the support she needs to thrive during this critical period.

⁷ Cleo provides virtual group workshops and lessons on a variety of potential postpartum challenges, including navigating NICU stays, lactation, sleep, mental health and anxiety support, and more.