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Contact: [DOH Communications](#)

Department of Health Announces Birth Equity Project Grant Recipients

Funding announced for organizations working to support healthy births and expand access to resources for birthing families

OLYMPIA – The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has awarded Birth Equity Project funding to five organizations serving pregnant and birthing people in the state. These organizations are led by and serve Washington’s Black/African American, African Immigrant, and American Indian/Alaska Native communities.

DOH’s Birth Equity Project funding seeks to address and reduce the racism faced by birth workers and families of the priority communities and improve birth outcomes. DOH is investing in community-based birth worker organizations helping close the gaps through culturally responsive care.

In 2019, Washington’s Native American/Alaska Native population had the highest infant mortality rate in the state, followed by Non-Hispanic Black/African American and Pacific Islander populations. American Indian and Alaska Native people experienced higher maternal mortality rates than any other race/ethnic group, as noted in [DOH’s 2023 Maternal Mortality Report](#). These differences have remained relatively constant over the past two decades and are linked to a long history of racism and institutional and systemic practices in health systems. Our research shows that perinatal health, birth outcomes, and infant mortality rates are connected to the quality of medical care access, health status, and public health policies and practices. Poor health outcomes during pregnancy, at birth, postpartum, and in infants are largely preventable through public health measures.

Each organization will receive up to \$200,000 per fiscal year for 2.5 years. Funds will support organizations’ efforts to continue providing culturally responsive services to pregnant and birthing people to help them receive the best care possible. The funded projects include doula work, an evidence-based strategy to reduce maternal mortality.

Organizations receiving funding are:

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- **Ayan Maternity Health Care Support** – perinatal support and professional development opportunities to East African immigrants and refugees in King County.
- **BLKBRY** – care and resources in Black reproductive, perinatal, lactation support, and Black infant and toddler health care. Services offered across the state.
- **The Nisqually Tribal Health and Wellness Center** – perinatal health services to American Indian/Alaska Natives living in Thurston County and Nisqually Tribal members.
- **Shades of Motherhood** – serving Black mothers, people of color, and their infants to overcome barriers to care in Spokane and Eastern Washington.
- **Spokane Tribal Network** – a non-profit based on the Spokane Indian Reservation partnering with Həłmxiłp (Cedar Circle) Indigenous Birth Justice to improve reproductive health in rural and urban areas of Spokane Tribal communities in Spokane and Stevens County.

“Through this funding, we are strengthening the network of community-based organizations providing critical support and culturally responsive care to Washington's birthing families to help them have healthy starts and the opportunity to achieve their full health potential,” said Lacy Fehrenbach, Chief of Prevention, Safety and Health, Washington State Department of Health.

To select the grantees, DOH worked closely with a community advisory board called the Birth Equity Advisory Committee, which is made up of doulas, midwives, and caregivers from the priority communities of the grant. This work is funded through the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant that DOH receives from the Centers for Disease Control. Previous funding was used to respond to the infant formula shortage in 2022, train doulas, provide prenatal care for rural communities, and support home visiting programs.

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