

## Know Your Rights

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All women have the right to **respectful, safe, dignified, comprehensive, and high-quality care** during their pregnancy and birthing experience.



All women deserve to have a healthy pregnancy and **positive birth experience**, a birth in which a woman feels she has the best quality health care, has freedom of choice, access to accurate information, and that she is in control and respected. Yet for too many women, and in particular Black women, factors such as medical provider bias, lead to a health care team not being fully attentive to their experiences or medical needs. This results in unacceptably poor maternal and infant health outcomes, including pregnancy complications, higher rates of premature, low birth weight babies, and even maternal and infant death.<sup>1</sup>

### **A positive birth experience results from the following factors:**

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- Women are where they want to be
- Choices are informed by reality not fear
- Women are listened to and treated with respect and dignity
- Mothers are empowered and enriched
- Memories are warm and proud<sup>2</sup>

This document outlines what you, your partner, and your family should expect in health care interactions to ensure the best possible outcomes for your pregnancy and birth, and further serves as a guide to engage health care providers and hospitals to ensure their policies, practices, and behaviors best serve Black women throughout the pregnancy and birthing process.

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## This means you have a right to...



### Respect, dignity, and nondiscrimination throughout your care

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Your health care team must treat you with dignity and respect, and their care must be anti-racist and free of bias. They cannot discriminate against you or your support partner on the basis of race, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, preferred language, disability, or your housing, insurance, or immigration status.

This also means that your care team must maintain your right to privacy, allow you unrestricted access to your patient records, and should always acknowledge and address any concerns or complaints about your care in a timely fashion. You can learn more about filing a complaint if you feel you've been mistreated by going [here](#).



### Education, information about your pregnancy and childbirth, and decisions made throughout your care

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You have the right to receive information about the types of providers you can see and use during your pregnancy and childbirth (e.g., doulas, midwives, or ob/gyns); information and options on where you choose to give birth; resources to prepare for childbirth such as counselors, childbirth, and breastfeeding classes and support groups; information about your potential birth outcomes; and referrals to services such as housing, food, health insurance, and other resources. For additional resources, go [here](#).



### Ask questions, participate in decisions, and provide informed consent for anything related to your well-being and that of your child

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This includes full, advance information from your care team regarding the costs, benefits, and risks of medication, pain relief strategies, procedures, tests, and decisions required during pregnancy and childbirth, in addition to your choices related to caring for and feeding your baby. You also have the right to change your mind. These decisions should also be documented, respected, and supported by your care team.



## Quality, respectful care that honors your choices, preferences, preferred language, culture, religion, or traditions

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Including the right to receive care provided in your preferred language, or timely access to an interpreter; respect and accommodations for your personal, traditional, religious, or cultural preferences during and after pregnancy and childbirth; and access to a trained, skilled, and respectful health care team.



## Personal support before, during, and after your pregnancy and childbirth

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This means that your health care decisions, such as where to give birth; laboring at your own pace and position; what procedures will be performed on you; your choices related to use of drugs; whether you are supported by your partner, midwife, doula, or other companion during pregnancy and childbirth; and choices for feeding and caring for your baby, are fully supported by your care team.

This also means that you can change your mind, and you can decide, for example, whether or not to get an epidural or accept a recommended C-section, regardless of hospital policies. Support also includes your care team providing you with continuity of care and a pre-established referral plan for you and your baby, and ensuring you have the information, counseling, and support services you need for your physical and emotional well-being during and after childbirth.

**We encourage you to share and discuss this information with your partner and current or potential health care providers to ensure your voice is heard and your needs are being met throughout your and your baby's care.**

The rights listed here may be similar to what is covered by health plans, hospitals, and other documents such as your health care center's Patient Bill of Rights. However, this document aims to inform women and their partners about what they should expect from health care interactions to ensure the best possible outcomes.

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In California, the [The Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act \(Senate Bill 464\)](#), aims to reduce pregnancy-related preventable deaths, severe illnesses, and associated health disparities by addressing implicit bias among health care providers and prepares them to better care for women during pregnancy and childbirth. Senate Bill 464 will preserve lives so that childbirth remains a joyful moment for all mothers, and not a life-threatening event for Black moms. Learn more [here](#).

**This document’s development was informed by the following resources and sources:**

[Black Birthing Bill of Rights by the National Association to Advance Black Birth \(2020\)](#)

[Birthing People’s Bill of Rights COVID-19 Edition](#)

[Black Women Birthing Justice](#)

[California Preterm Birth Initiative](#)

[The National Partnership for Women and Families and Childbirth Connection’s Rights of Childbearing Women \(2018\)](#)

[The New York City Department of Health’s “New York City Standards for Respectful Care at Birth.” \(2019\)](#)

[The Positive Birth Movement](#)

[The World Health Organization’s Recommendations: Intrapartum Care for a Positive Childbirth Experience \(2018\)](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Theresa Chalhoub and Kelly Rimar, “The Health Care System and Racial Disparities in Maternal Mortality”. (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> The Positive Birth Movement. Additional information available at: <https://www.positivebirthmovement.org/about/whatispositivebirth/>

**Black  
Legacy  
Now**

To learn more about the San Diego Perinatal Equity Initiative and the *Black Legacy Now* campaign supporting the ending of unequal maternal and infant health outcomes, click [here](#).

