



Home Birth: Resources for Payers and Policymakers

Home Birth is a Rational, Personal Choice



Women and families choose home birth for many reasons, based on physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural considerations. Recent research provides insight into these choices.

Women and their families cite the following reasons for choosing home birth:

- ❖ Increased privacy, comfort and convenience
- ❖ Reduced rates of medical intervention
- ❖ Reduced risk of infection
- ❖ Greater cultural and spiritual congruency
- ❖ Greater family involvement and a relaxed peaceful atmosphere

Women consistently report that these factors increase their sense of safety and help them participate more fully in decision-making around aspects of their care.^{1- 8}

In 2003, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada issued a policy statement on midwifery that advocates for the further integration of midwives into maternity services and “recognizes and stresses the importance of choice for women and their families in the birthing process.”

A Right to Choose

Women want and have a right to share in decisions regarding their childbirth. Expert advisory panels in several nations, including the US, recommend that a woman’s informed choice of place of birth be respected and that appropriate home birth maternity services be made available.^{9- 16}

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Women have Increased Access to Research Findings Supporting Home Birth

Women and their families also have a right to unbiased information based on current scientific evidence, and global communications have made international research and evidence-based maternity care options increasingly available to the public. Women and their families are aware that recent cohort studies in national and international settings indicate that planned home births are associated with similar perinatal outcomes and fewer obstetric interventions compared to hospital births.^{18- 29}

Reduced Availability of VBAC

Another factor in the desire for home birth in the US is the plummeting availability of vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) despite current research demonstrating that successful VBAC results in significant benefits and fewer risks for women and infants than repeat cesarean delivery.

ACNM recommends that health care make it a priority to ensure continuity of care for women regardless of choice of birth site or birth attendant.

Nonetheless, in many hospitals, VBACs have become unavailable. Women who have had a previous cesarean section are left to make the often difficult choice between a repeat cesarean and laboring at home, where heightened surveillance and medical consultation are less likely to be immediately available.

Key elements of a successful VBAC include:

- ❖ Unbiased appropriate informed consent
- ❖ Heightened surveillance of fetal heart rate patterns
- ❖ Appropriate arrangements for medical consultation and emergency care

Women and Families will continue to Choose Home Birth

With so many factors influencing the choice of birth site, the demand for home birth is likely to continue. In light of this reality, ACNM recommends that health care make it a priority to ensure continuity of care for women regardless of choice of birth site or birth attendant. By improving the conditions and communication around transfer of care from one birth setting to another, or one care provider to another, transfer of care can seamlessly and efficiently be accomplished avoiding minimizing any delays in initiating appropriate interventions.

- ❖ *ACNM urges payers and policymakers to respect women's choices and work collaboratively and strategically with all maternity care providers to ensure continuity of care and appropriate linkages when women need a higher level of care in any birth setting.*
- ❖ *ACNM recommends that our maternity care system be aligned with the international community of scientific investigators and clinicians in order to better serve American families.*
- ❖ *ACNM urges payers and policymakers to work strategically to increase the availability of VBAC.*

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