

Midwives as Essential Primary Care Providers in the Context of COVID-19

Statement issued on April 3, 2020

The Canadian Association of Midwives (CAM) and the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives (NACM) are the national organizations representing midwives and the profession of midwifery in Canada. As we collectively confront the COVID-19 pandemic, midwives and midwifery associations across the country are in a unique position to improve care practices and safety for childbearing families, while reducing pressure on the health care system as it deals with the pandemic. CAM and NACM, in collaboration with our provincial and territorial midwifery associations, urge governments to consider the following recommendations to ensure an optimal use and deployment of our services.

1. ESSENTIAL SUPPORT FOR MIDWIVES

During the COVID-19 pandemic, federal, provincial, and territorial governments and their health authorities must include midwives in their plans to support primary care providers.

We recommend:

- Ensuring availability of personal protection equipment (PPE) to midwives, whether in hospital, in birth centres, or for home births.
- Rapid access to COVID-19 testing for midwives to ensure safe provision of care.
- Rapid access to COVID-19 testing for childbearing families to make appropriate health care decisions.
- Midwives have access to the same emergency services as other health care providers, such as childcare.
- Special safety considerations for midwives working in remote and rural communities, Indigenous communities, and in smaller teams.
- Additional resources for individuals who have been evacuated from their communities to give birth, to ensure that they do not bring COVID-19 back to their communities.
- Equitable, speedy, and free access to virtual platforms and electronic medical records systems to reduce in-person visits.
- Providing midwives with sufficient rest periods and mental health support.
- Maximum flexibility in funding from governments and midwifery employers so that midwives can care for additional clients and take on an expanded scope of practice. This is especially relevant for Indigenous, rural, and remote communities.

2. PRIMARY CARE PROVISION IN THE COMMUNITY

As hospitals see a surge in COVID-19 in the coming weeks and months, midwives can play an important role in reducing the number of patients entering and overburdening these facilities. Midwives are experts in supporting birth in out-of-hospital settings, such as in homes and birth centres, and can provide key insights to the healthcare system during this pandemic.

We recommend:

- Maintaining home birth as it continues to be a safe place to give birth for many clients.
- Utilizing birth centres as key birthing locations for all healthy people and using them to full capacity during this crisis.

- Establishing temporary birth centres and sites that are independent of acute care, to keep healthy people out of hospitals.
- Including provincial and territorial midwifery associations at decision making tables regarding perinatal care.

3. FULL AND EXPANDED SCOPE FOR MIDWIVES

Midwives must be operating at a full and expanded scope of practice. This expanded scope will reduce the need for avoidable consultations with doctors, while providing more responsive and seamless care. This expanded scope is consistent with midwifery training and experience across the country.

We recommend:

- A broader and increased prescribing ability.
- Increased ability to order laboratory and diagnostic tests.
- Broader vaccination scope.
- Consultation with midwives at provincial, territorial, and local levels to determine additional expansions in scope.

4. EXPANDING THE MIDWIFERY WORKFORCE

Following the lead of jurisdictions highly affected by COVID-19, provisions must be made to increase the number of midwives to help ease the burden on the health care system.

We recommend:

- Temporary licensing systems for midwives who have been in recent practice, for senior students, and for internationally trained midwives with appropriate qualifications.
- Remove barriers around privileging at hospital facilities, to ensure that all midwives can work at the facility where they are most needed.

Together, CAM & NACM represent 2000 midwives and Indigenous midwives working across the country. We are committed to learning from our midwives on the ground how to best tackle the pandemic to ensure midwives are protected and mobilized to their fullest potential to care for healthy people and their babies. We invite further consultation at all levels – federal, provincial and territorial – so that midwives can continue to provide safe, respectful and quality sexual and reproductive health care during this crisis, and beyond.

<https://canadianmidwives.org/>

<https://indigenoumidwifery.ca/>