

**AMÁ BIDZIIL:
SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS
STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING
MATERNAL HEALTH IN TRIBAL
COMMUNITIES**



40TH TELLURIDE MIDWINTER CONFERENCE ON
WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S HEALTHCARE

JANUARY 24TH, 2026
TELLURIDE, CO



CENTER FOR
INDIGENOUS HEALTH

NNR-25.553

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AMÁ BIDZIIL (STRONG MOTHERS) TEAM



**Jennifer
Richards**



**Tiffani
Begay**



**Maria
Walsh**

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**JOHNS HOPKINS CENTER FOR
INDIGENOUS HEALTH AT THE
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC HEALTH**


Founded in 1991 by Dr. Mathu Santosham, based on
10 years of work with Southwest tribes.

Mission: To work in partnership with communities
to advance Indigenous wellbeing and health
leadership to the highest level.

Vision: Thriving Indigenous communities world
wide.

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SUPPORTING WOMEN'S HEALTH



Family Spirit
Asdzaán Be'eena'
Hozhó Horizons

**Amá Bidziil
(Birth Support)**
FS Strengths
(maternal MH)

**Men's Health (Azhe'é/Hastiin Bidziil; Young Men's Health;
"Doulo")**

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Family Spirit Home Visiting Program

- Evidence-based home visiting program developed for and with Native American families
- Developed and evaluated with Navajo Nation, White Mountain Apache and San Carlos Apache communities since 1995
- Curriculum and support delivered by community-based health educators
- Now shared with Indigenous communities nationally and globally - with training, curriculum and implementation support provided by JHCIH




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Azhe'é Bidziil (Strong Fathers) Program: Improving Outcomes Among Rural Fathers and their Families



GOAL: to evaluate a program for Native fathers (and father-figures) that aims to increase economic stability, reduce violence in rural Native communities, and increase healthy relationships and co-parenting in Native communities.






NNR-21.401

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Hastiin Bidziil (Strong Man) Study

NNR-24.513


GOAL: Measure the effectiveness of a secondary prevention program aimed at reducing substance use among Native men between the ages of 18-30




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REFLECTING: THE CURRENT MATERNAL HEALTH LANDSCAPE

- Late to no prenatal care → 3x higher
- Pregnancy-related mortality → 2.3x higher
- Rates of severe maternal mortality and morbidity → 2x higher
- Smoking during pregnancy → 1.4x higher
- Arizona AI/AN
 - Maternal mortality ratio → 4x higher
 - Pregnancy-related deaths that are preventable → ~90%



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WHAT THE DATA DOES NOT CAPTURE



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BRIDGING THE GAP



- Western medical model vs. Indigenous holistic approach
- Traditional/Cultural Support Systems
- Need for culturally safe care

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DOULAS AS A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SOLUTION



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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT DOULA SUPPORT?



Image: Indigenous Birthworkers Community Conference

Doula support has shown:

- Improved maternal mental health
- Positive childbirth experiences
- Decreased medical interventions
- Decreased cesarean sections
- Decreased complications of pregnancy/birth
- Increased maternal satisfaction
- Shortened duration of labor
- Improved Apgar scores
- Increased breastfeeding initiation
- Culturally safe prenatal care

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INDIGENOUS DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH (IDOH)

"Indigeneity" and "colonialism" are broad determinants

Wholistic wellbeing of Indigenous peoples tied to planetary health

IDOH Examples

Indigeneity	Colonialism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribal language • Land and birth practices • Indigenous food systems • Access to and health of "fellow relatives" • Acknowledgement of sovereignty of Indigenous rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-reliance on Western approaches • Forced assimilation • Dispossession of land • Loss of cultural identity • Forced sterilization of AI/AN women

Redvers et al., 2023

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What we know

What is missing?

Why is high quality data important?

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BUILDING A BRIDGE THROUGH RESEARCH

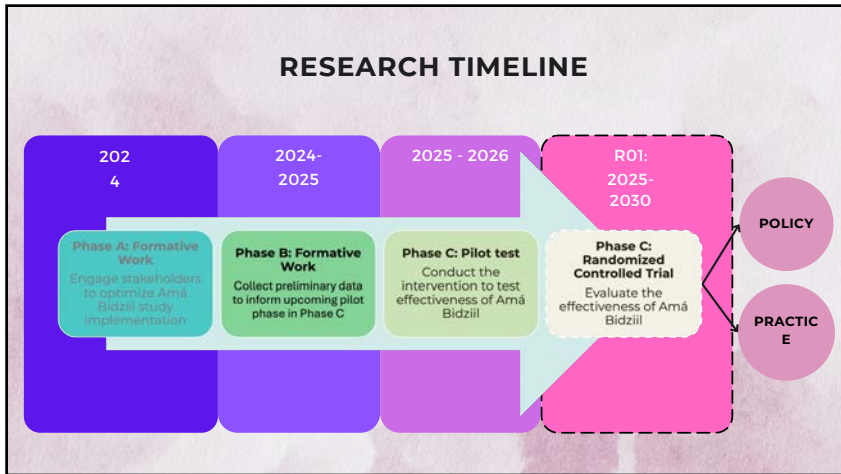
Amá Bidziil: Community-Engaged Research to Strengthen Practice and Inform Policy

Willow Doula: Formative/Pilot Study

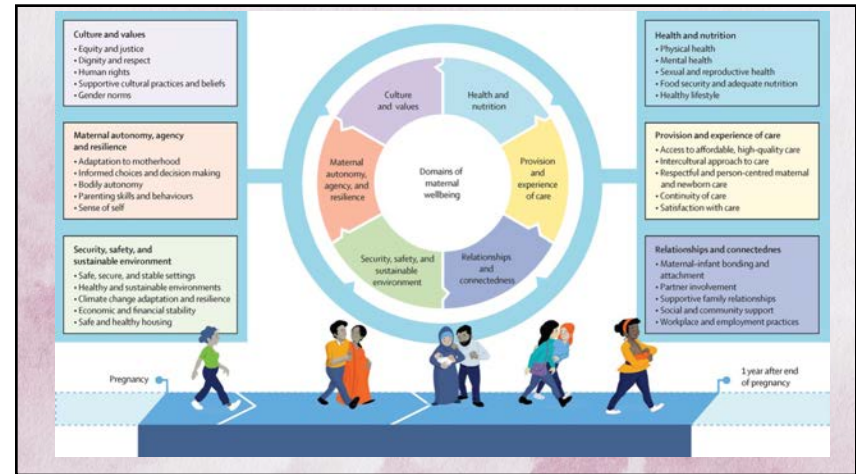
- Developing/piloting a doula training program
- Preparing for a rigorous evaluation

Rigorous Evaluation (NIH R01): Randomized controlled trial that will explore the impact of doula/birth support on MIH outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and barriers to and facilitators of program uptake.

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PROVIDER FOCUS GROUPS

- Women's health providers on/near the Navajo Nation

How might doulas enhance standard perinatal care? How might they support a culturally safe birthing environment?

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PROVIDER FOCUS GROUPS - IF INTERESTED


SCAN ME

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WILLOW DOULA: YARNING WITH BIRTH SUPPORTERS

- Yarning is a way of sharing knowledge through conversations (e.g., storytelling, metaphors, song).

What topics are critical for doulas to know/understand in providing birth support?



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ARE YOU A BIRTH SUPPORTER (INCLUDING DOULAS)?

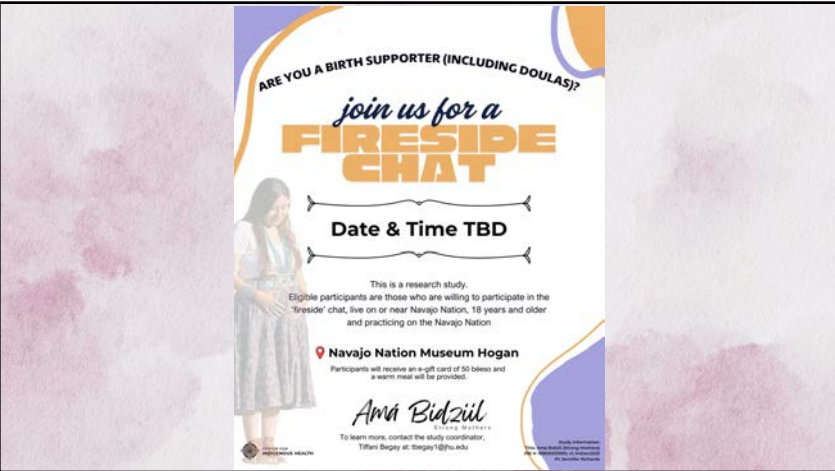
join us for a
FIRESIDE CHAT

Date & Time TBD

This is a research study. Eligible participants are those who are willing to participate in the 'fireside' chat, live on or near Navajo Nation, 18 years and older and practicing on the Navajo Nation

Navajo Nation Museum Hogan
Participants will receive an e-gift card of \$50 bisso and a warm meal will be provided.

Anni Bidzail
To learn more, contact the study coordinator, Tiffany Begay at: tbegay@pho.edu



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INTERVIEWS WITH MOTHERS

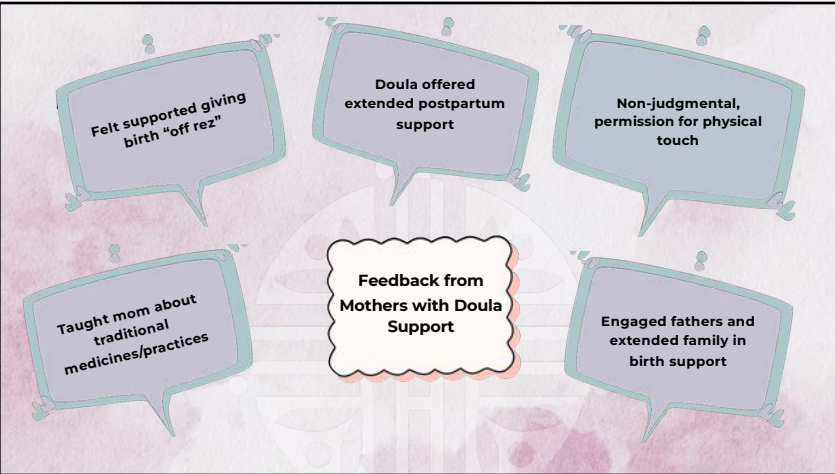
- PERCEPTIONS OF:
 - Birth Support
 - Cultural Safety
 - Perinatal Experiences



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Feedback from Mothers with Doula Support

- Felt supported giving birth "off rez"
- Doula offered extended postpartum support
- Non-judgmental, permission for physical touch
- Taught mom about traditional medicines/practices
- Engaged fathers and extended family in birth support



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Feedback from Mothers *without* Doula Support

- Traumatic birth experiences were more common
- Older child served as "birth supporter"
- Openness to doula (as an advocate) since (grand)mother was unavailable
- Fathers served in "doulo" role

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DOULOS*: ENGAGING NATIVE MEN IN BIRTH SUPPORT

1. Assess the acceptability and feasibility of engaging Native fathers in birth support.
2. Explore fathers' knowledge, attitudes and practices of perinatal health (for both mom and dad)
3. Develop/pilot a brief birth support intervention for men

*Not funded (yet)

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REFLECTING

- Research informing practice and policy
- Lifespan approach to holistic maternal and family wellness
- Precision birth support - are doulas more effective for certain mothers?
- Supporting doula practice through data and policy
 - Health systems collaboration
 - Legislative initiatives: Doula reimbursement rates (cost-effectiveness), increased funding for community-based doulas, Medicaid billing, Private insurance coverage (?)

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Any questions?

Ahéhee'

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