

Utilize Alternate Care Settings

Utilizing alternate care settings includes innovations that repurpose, convert, or construct new space to deliver care. During the pandemic, particularly during surges in cases, health systems have needed to identify additional spaces for patient care to accommodate increased volume and lengths of stay, while also reducing the density of people within existing spaces. In some cases, there was also a need to centralize essential equipment, such as masks to certain locations, requiring creative use of space. At the same time, some birthing people were increasingly interested in avoiding hospital settings or contact with large numbers of people due to potential COVID exposure. Because of visitor restrictions, doulas and even partners and family members were (and, in some places, are still) not able to be present, which led to people seeking out-of-hospital maternity care.

Participants reported that in some cases birth centers across the country had to put potential clients on waiting lists due to the increased demand exceeding existing capacity. Those with less trust in the existing hospital-based care settings due to poor prior experiences seemed most likely to seek out care in alternate settings.

Participants highlighted that innovations that utilize alternate care settings can be particularly helpful for:

- Reducing the risk of COVID-exposure for birthing people
- Supporting the growing movement of BIPOC seeking out of hospital, and particularly home birth with Black/Brown and Indigenous providers
- Leveraging the ways that barriers to alternate care settings that have been lifted due to COVID to expand access (i.e. midwives having admitting privileges where they previously didn't, restrictions on birth centers easing)

Strategies for Utilizing Alternate Care Settings

Health system leaders interested in innovations that utilize alternate care settings should consider the following strategies for building demand among birthing people and health system stakeholders and augmenting the supply of enabling factors to support successful and sustainable implementation. These strategies summarize key action steps recommended by participants for building momentum, but they are not intended to be comprehensive or required for all settings depending on your local context.

Promote understanding of alternate care setting options among birthing people

- ❑ Educate birthing people about available alternate settings, their qualifications and credentials, their capabilities and services, and their connections to other settings

- ❑ Address potential concerns for birthing people about alternate care settings by providing transparent communication about what to expect and how any potential complications will be handled throughout their care
- ❑ Highlight opportunities for respectful, dignified, and culturally concordant care and communication in alternate care settings

Enhance communication and collaboration between hospitals and birth centers

- ❑ Establish and integrate relationships and communication channels between healthcare systems and out-of-hospital providers, including birth centers and home birth midwives
- ❑ Develop clear criteria for transfer to the hospital setting and a well-coordinated, collaborative transfer process
- ❑ Develop shared values and principles for delivering care centered around safety, quality, dignity, and respect
- ❑ Collaborate on regulatory matters, including quality assurance, liability, and credentialing
- ❑ Established shared electronic health record systems
- ❑ Host joint clinical training and professional development opportunities with collaborating out of hospital providers

Develop policies that support alternate care settings

- ❑ Capitalize on relaxed facility fee requirements to establish alternate care sites
- ❑ Include alternate care sites in negotiations with payers
- ❑ Develop policies for shared reimbursement when labor is primarily managed out of hospital but the delivery occurs at the hospital
- ❑ Consider shared financial assistance programs for families with limited means
- ❑ Support referring birth centers in pursuing accreditation