

In North Carolina, the call for health equity is particularly pronounced, especially when considering the disparities in perinatal care and outcomes among pregnant individuals.

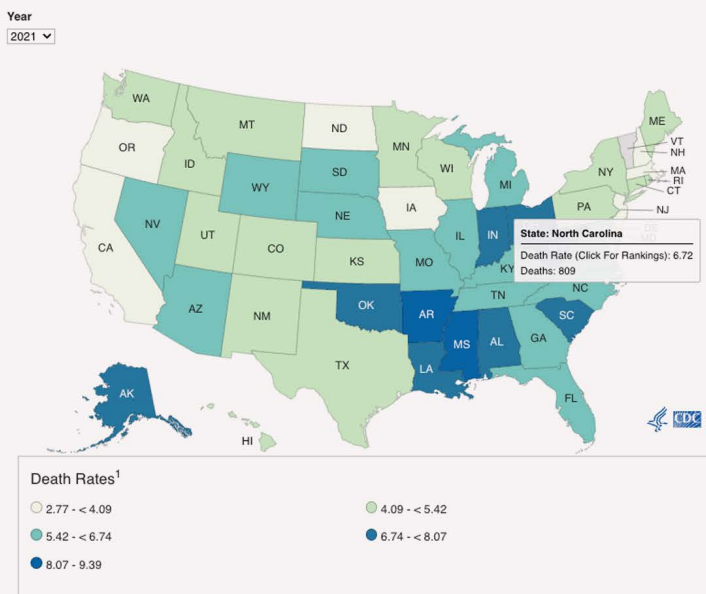
Tackling these challenges necessitates a substantial emphasis on broadening access to certified professional midwives.



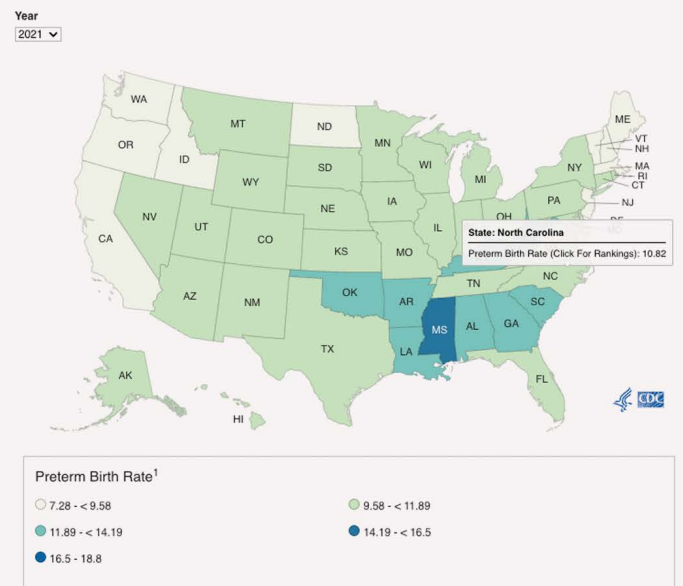
Despite being one of the world’s wealthiest countries, the United States is grappling with a [concerning rise in maternal mortality rates](#). In the [southeastern states](#), including North Carolina, maternal vulnerability is prevalent. According to the [CDC’s 2021 study](#), North Carolina’s infant maternal mortality rate stands at 6.72 per 1,000 live births, while the [preterm birth rate](#) is 10.82.

The vulnerability of mothers in the southeastern United States is stark, particularly in states like Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas, to name a few. Racism emerges as a significant factor, contributing to the higher vulnerability of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native pregnant people, who are [2-4 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes](#) than their White counterparts.

Infant Mortality Rates by State



Percentage of Births Born Preterm by State



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, September 12). National Center for Health Statistics: North Carolina. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/northcarolina/nc.htm>

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The [Maternal Vulnerability Index](#) further underscores these disparities, revealing significantly higher vulnerability scores for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native mothers.

In North Carolina, the need to address disparities in perinatal care and outcomes for pregnant people is imperative. Addressing these issues requires a significant focus on expanding access to care and support in the communities where pregnant people live. As highlighted by the Access and Integration Maternity Care Mapping (AIMM) Study, the integration of midwives in the [state ranks the lowest nationwide](#), creating a substantial barrier to improving outcomes for mothers and families.

One approach is to provide access to certified professional midwives. This approach is a tangible and immediate step toward improving access and outcomes and promoting health equity. [Decades](#) of studies have consistently shown that midwifery care, especially for low-risk deliveries, is safe, with fewer interventions (ex., cesarean section or use of forceps) and substantial cost savings.

Southern states have a rich history with midwifery. For generations, home births with community midwives, [often Black traditional midwives](#), known as Grand Midwives, were the norm. However, as the medical system gained prominence, government interventions and regulations created barriers, almost eliminating traditional midwives. It wasn't until 1983 that midwifery re-entered North Carolina's healthcare system with Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs).

Black History Month

The Historical Significance of Doulas and Midwives



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[Click above to learn more from the National Museum of African American History & Culture.](#)

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Certified Nurse Midwife vs. Certified Professional Midwife

Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs) begin their careers as registered nurses and pivot to pursue education and training in midwifery. Established in 1994, the Certified Professional Midwife (CPM) credential provides a community-based, apprenticeship-oriented approach to training and education, allowing practitioners to support low-risk, healthy births while collaborating with the medical system as needed. The educational path for a certified nurse midwife begins with obtaining a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and obtaining RN licensure.

After gaining at least one year of experience as an RN, individuals become eligible to enroll in a specialized Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) program, which results in either a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) or Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. This program focuses on advanced knowledge in midwifery, reproductive healthcare, and women's health. Graduate-level education for CNMs strongly emphasizes in-depth training, including clinical experience in providing comprehensive care during pregnancy, labor and delivery, and the postpartum period. To attain CNM certification, individuals must successfully pass the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB) Nurse-Midwifery/Midwifery Examination.

Accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME) is mandatory for all graduate programs in midwifery and nurse-midwifery. Seeking certification, midwives and nurse midwives must also complete an exam administered by the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB). While primarily trained in hospitals, CNMs provide birth care in various settings, including hospitals, homes, and birth centers. Their scope of care encompasses prenatal care, labor and delivery support, postpartum care, gynecological services, reproductive health visits, and more.



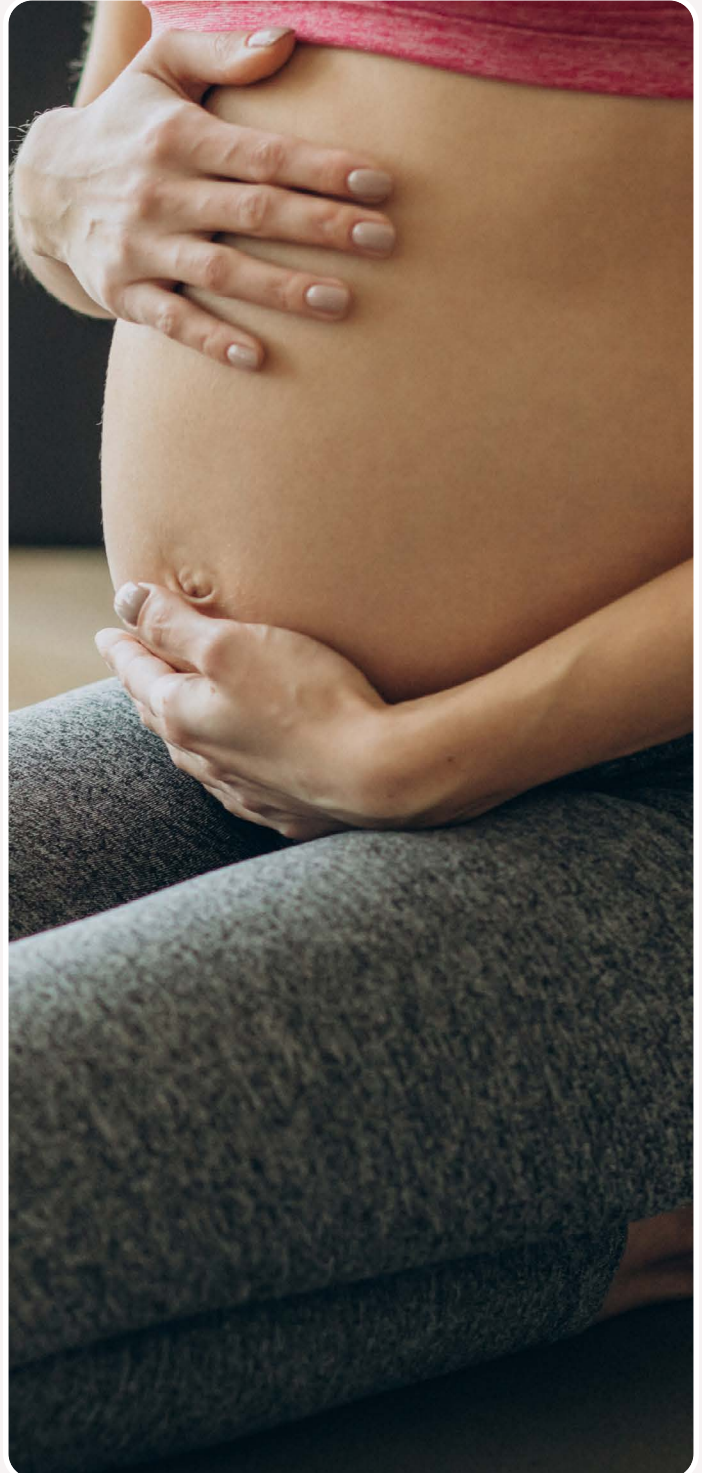
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The traditional apprenticeship model, rooted in the historical practices handed down by grandmidwives in the South, remains a fundamental aspect of midwifery education. To attain certification, individuals complete extensive apprenticeships with experienced midwives, engaging in a process that combines practical experience and academic study.

The apprenticeship process for CPM candidates is rigorous, requiring a minimum of ten observation births, including home and planned hospital births. Aspiring midwives then progress to 20 births as assistant midwives, learning essential skills and evaluations crucial for supporting low-risk pregnancies. The next phase involves 25 births as primary midwives, who lead in providing care while receiving guidance and support from their preceptor. This hands-on education occurs in both birth center and home settings, ensuring a well-rounded experience.

Moreover, the training requirements extend beyond deliveries. CPM candidates must engage with 50 clients throughout their pregnancy, provide primary midwifery care during labor and delivery for 50 clients, and conduct 50 postpartum interactions and newborn examinations. These milestones must be achieved within ten years, with a minimum three-year commitment to the apprenticeship to ensure thorough training.



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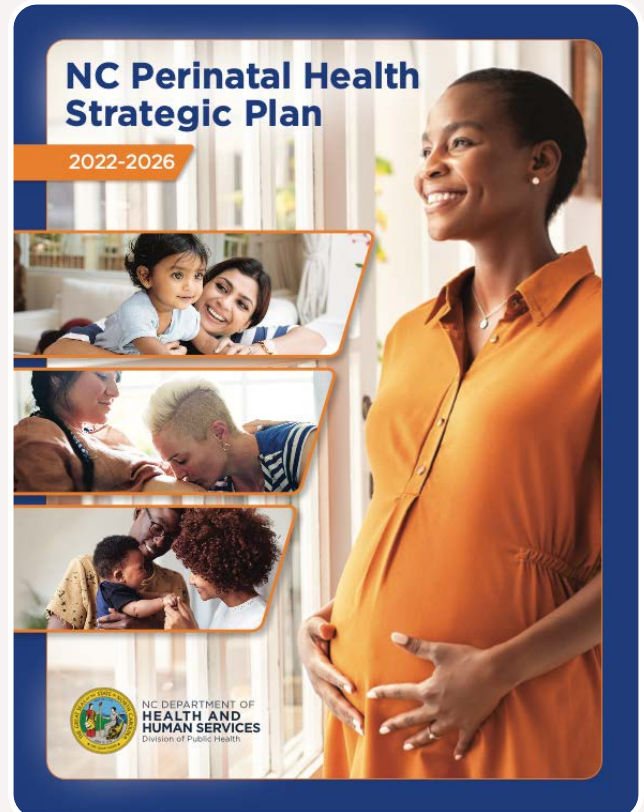
Pursuing Change in North Carolina

North Carolina currently faces a [shortage](#) of midwifery providers. While certified nurse midwives are recognized and licensed in the state, [CPMs lack this recognition](#), posing a significant barrier to expanding access to midwifery care. This gap in licensing limits the number of providers available across communities to provide care to pregnant people. Recognition of the CPM credential and licensure of CPMs in North Carolina remains crucial to addressing the shortage and ensuring that pregnant individuals receive adequate prenatal care, reducing the risk associated with the current scarcity of midwifery providers in the state.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) has recently unveiled the [NC Perinatal Health Strategic Plan](#), a comprehensive statewide guide to enhance [maternal and infant health and overall population health](#). This strategic plan encompasses targeted recommendations geared toward improving maternal health outcomes. It marks a significant milestone for the Department of Health and Human Services in North Carolina, providing a written document that identifies prevailing issues within the state's perinatal healthcare system.

The plan establishes goals grounded in evidence-based information, drawing on proven strategies from successful implementations in other states. This document can be leveraged by advocates to catalyze change, working collectively to address challenges and advance the overall well-being of our communities.

Within the NC Perinatal Health Strategic Plan framework, Recommendation 3.3 stands out as a pivotal proposal with the potential to bring about substantial positive change. This recommendation advocates for establishing a licensure board by the North Carolina



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3.3 HEALTH CARE LICENSURE FOR CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL MIDWIVES (CPM)

The North Carolina General Assembly should establish a licensure board to formulate, promulgate, amend, and repeal procedures, rules, and regulations for midwifery practice by Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs). The Licensure Board should be directed and have the authority for the following:

1. The licensing and regulation of CPMs.
2. Setting the standards and specifications for education, knowledge, and experience required for licensure as a CPM.
 - a. In establishing these requirements, the Licensure Board should give due consideration to criteria established by the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM) or other national standards established by professional societies with expertise in the training and certification of CPMs.
3. Establishment of a minimum standard of care for the provision of care by CPMs.
4. Establishment of a non-refundable application fee and license renewal fee.

General Assembly, specifically designed to oversee and govern the practice of Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs). The envisioned Licensure Board would play a crucial role in formulating, promulgating, amending, and repealing procedures, rules, and regulations pertaining to midwifery practice. It would be entrusted with the responsibility of licensing and regulating CPMs, setting comprehensive standards for education, knowledge, and experience necessary for licensure. Emphasizing the importance of national standards, the Licensure Board would consider criteria established by entities such as the [North American Registry of Midwives \(NARM\)](#) or other professional societies well-versed in CPM training and certification. Additionally, the recommendation calls for establishing a minimum standard of care for CPMs and implementing non-refundable application and license renewal fees.

This proposal marks a significant stride towards legitimizing and regulating the practice of Certified Professional Midwives in North Carolina, aiming to enhance the overall quality and accessibility of midwifery care in the state.



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Advocating For Change

“A Midwife Solution” is a documentary poised to be a driving force behind the push for licensure of Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) in North Carolina. The state grapples with higher-than-national-average rates of maternal and infant mortality, along with a concerning number of individuals receiving inadequate prenatal care.



Recognizing increased access to midwifery-led care as a pivotal part of the solution, the documentary will showcase the personal experiences of families who have experienced perinatal care with CPMs, insights from CPMs, and endorsements for CPM licensure from allied perinatal healthcare professionals.



This project, spearheaded by Nicole Havelka, stems from her advocacy journey that began 12 years ago while receiving perinatal care. Nicole’s diverse experience, from doula to Certified Professional Midwife, has fueled her passion for CPM licensure and integration into the perinatal healthcare system. As a Board Member of the [North Carolina Chapter of the Association of Certified Professional Midwives \(NC ACPM\)](#) and an active participant in the consumer branch, [NC for CPMs](#), Nicole envisions a North Carolina where CPMs are licensed, contributing to increased accessibility to midwifery care and subsequently improving outcomes.

Partnering with [Honey Head Films](#), Nicole aims to create an inspiring documentary that educates the public and policymakers, fostering support for the legislative journey ahead. Currently in pre-production, filming is set to commence in early 2024, with a target completion by late spring 2024. The premiere is set for August 2024, with events planned in Wilmington, Chapel Hill, Asheville, and additional cities. Post-premiere, the documentary will serve as a tool to garner support for introducing a licensure bill for CPMs at the onset of the 2025 legislative session, with the ultimate goal of granting North Carolina CPMs licensure, regulation, and integration into the perinatal healthcare system.

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Quality Access to Care is Proven to Impact Health Outcomes

The health and wellness of a society can be gauged by its treatment of birthing individuals and babies, as well as the resulting postnatal outcomes. Regrettably, North Carolina falls short in these measures, with unmet needs for birthing individuals and unfavorable outcomes. It is time for North Carolina to proactively address this issue by enacting legislation to license certified professional midwives. Integrating midwifery care into the perinatal healthcare system has consistently improved outcomes and experiences.

So, what can you do to take action?

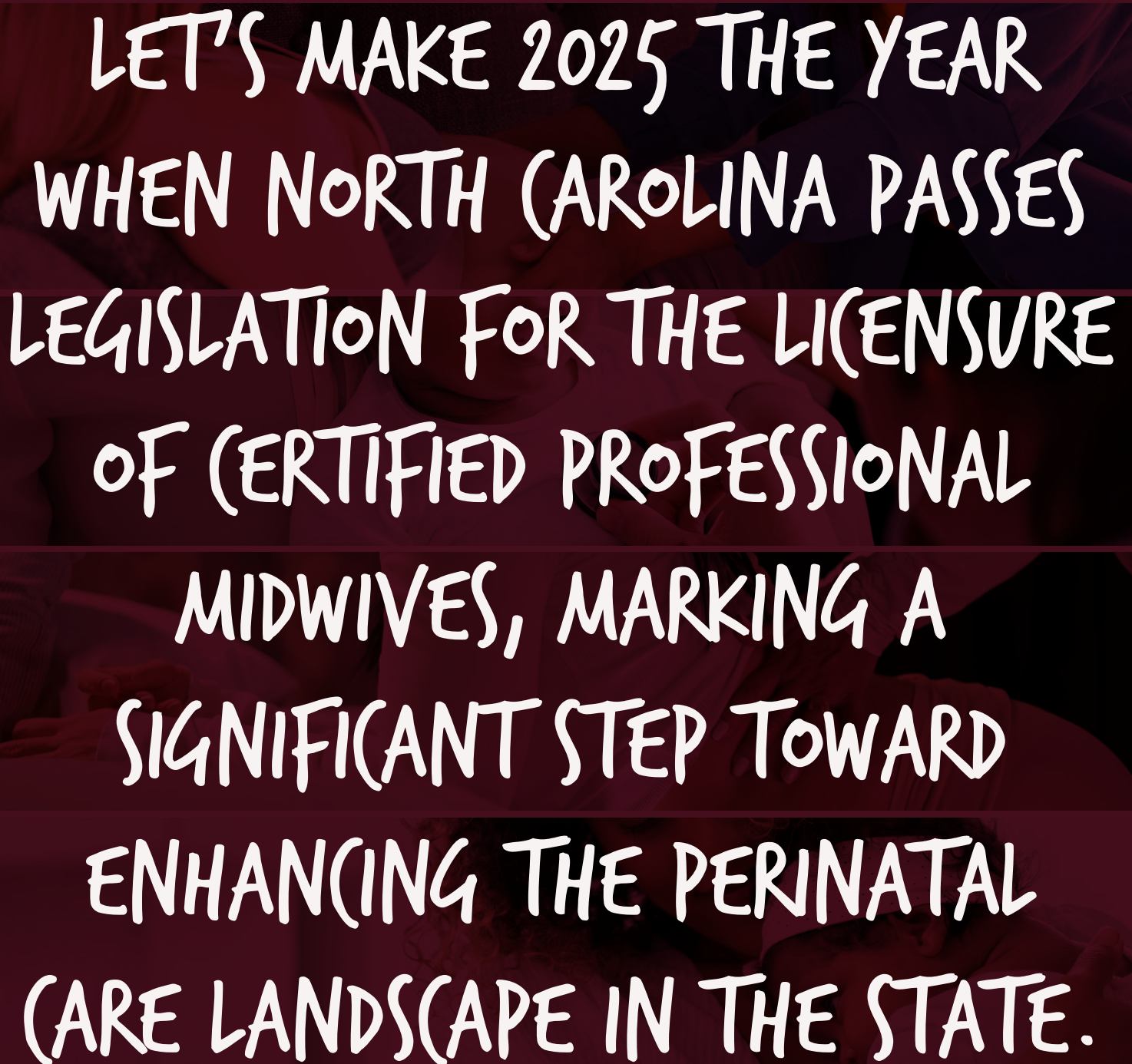
- » Connect with state organizations such as the [North Carolina National Association of Certified Professional Midwives](#) and [NC for CPMs](#) to bolster advocacy efforts.
- » Stay informed by signing up for the NC for CPMs newsletter [here](#).
- » Also, follow NC for CPMs on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).
- » Engage with your community by initiating or participating in a community birth meetup, connecting with fellow consumers of midwifery care. Support the cause by donating to statewide advocacy work and attending fundraisers and events that raise awareness about midwifery advocacy.
- » This [resource](#) will aid you in effectively reaching out to legislators and finding representatives.

For legislators and policymakers, we urge you to take notice and attend informational sessions. Educate yourselves with the wealth of studies and evidence showcasing the benefits of accessible and integrated midwifery care within the perinatal healthcare system. It's time to make the common-sense decision to act and improve the situation in North Carolina.



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LET'S MAKE 2025 THE YEAR
WHEN NORTH CAROLINA PASSES
LEGISLATION FOR THE LICENSURE
OF CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL
MIDWIVES, MARKING A
SIGNIFICANT STEP TOWARD
ENHANCING THE PERINATAL
CARE LANDSCAPE IN THE STATE.

www.ncforcpms.org/get-involved