



CHANGING  
WOMAN  
INITIATIVE

2023  
**IMPACT  
REPORT**

message from our

Founder

Dear Relatives,

Since 2015, Changing Woman Initiative has been working to grow public awareness around the overlooked issue that is Native American Maternal Health and the lack of Native American representation in midwifery. Some of our earlier projects included a digital storytelling project about Native American women's birthing experiences, setting up a midwifery field clinic in Standing Rock, and using our collective voice to advocate for improved Native American Maternal and Reproductive health policies in spaces like the United Nations.

As we prepare to step into 9 years of being in service to our community in 2024, it's not hard to reflect on the exponential organizational growth, we have had while challenging the status quo through our innovative approach to systems change in the maternal and reproductive health world.

Due to political determinants of health, Native Americans are disproportionately impacted by federal healthcare policies that make it harder to access maternal and reproductive health care. Right now 33% of New Mexico is considered a Maternal healthcare desert, which means families have to travel further and wait longer to access prenatal healthcare.

The mission of Changing Woman Initiative is to EMPOWER our diverse indigenous communities to protect cultural birth resiliency and the fundamental indigenous human right to reproductive health, dignity, & justice.

**I believe that birth and reproductive health care is a human right.**



In the last few years we have provided midwifery care to over **256 families, with 98% of those receiving free care.** We have also **trained over 86 Indigenous Doulas** in partnership with Zaagiidiwin Indigenous Doula program. We are actively working to improve maternal and reproductive healthcare for Native American families through our direct services, community training to increase birth workers in New Mexico, and legislative policies that center Native American Maternal and Reproductive Health.



Our collective work holds true to our vision to honor our human right to equitable reproductive health. CWI not only seeks to provide decolonized healthcare while recognizing that our communities are experts, but honor and respect traditional knowledge keepers who work to carry on that knowledge through life way teachings. By supporting the next generation from the womb forward, we are transforming our nations, one family at a time.

**Ahéhee'** to those have joined us in this work and are doing the work to improve access to care for Native American families.

I have immense gratitude and respect for those who have worked alongside me through the years, despite the many challenges we faced together. We now have an unshakable bond of respect, trust, honesty, and compassion for what each other carries in working for CWI.

These values are the basis of what I leave behind as I step away from CWI.

In Solidarity,

*Nicolle L. Gonzales*

Founder & Health Policy Director  
Changing Woman Initiative





# 256

families served

# 86

Indigenous doulas  
trained

~ since 2018 ~

# foundational values & approach

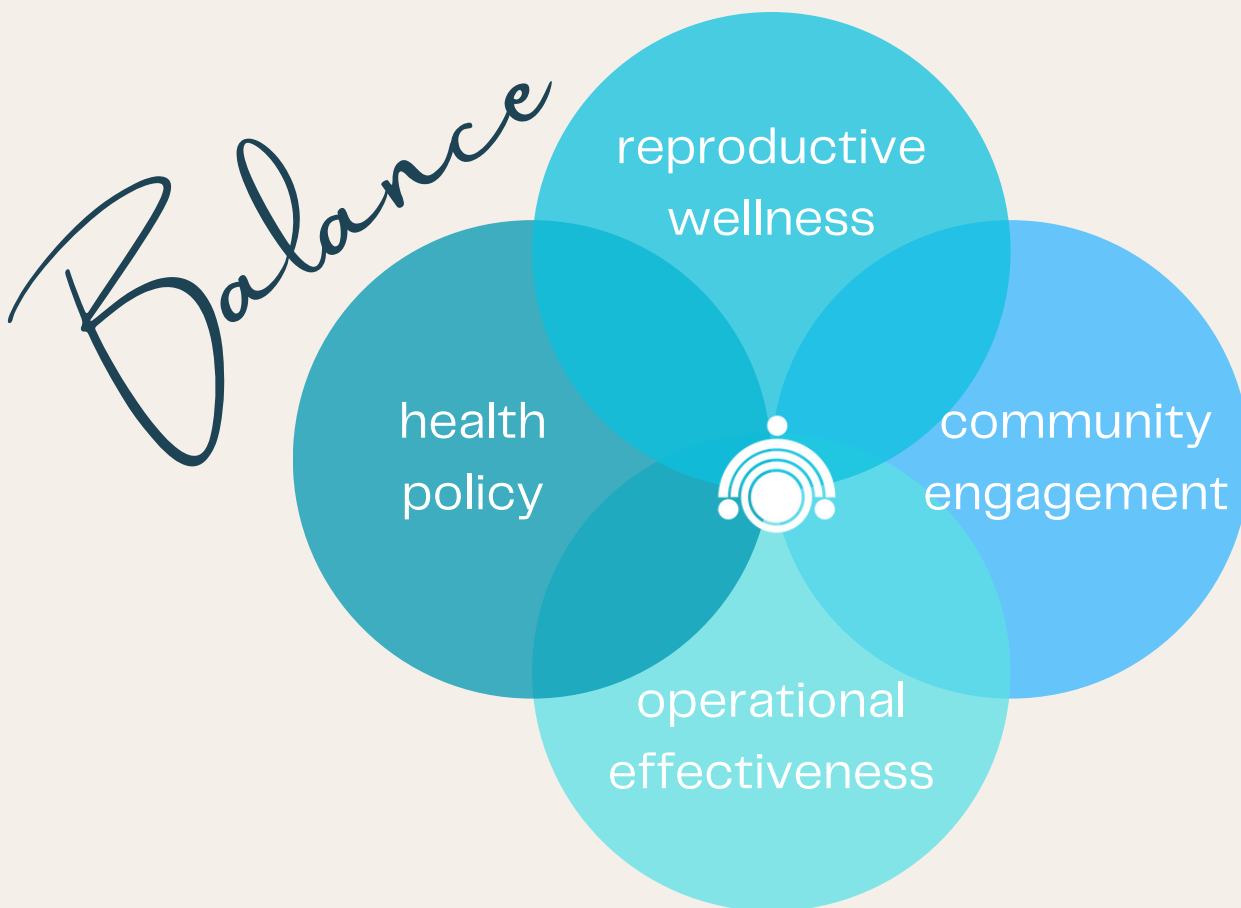
## MISSION:

Our mission is to empower diverse Indigenous communities to protect cultural birth resiliency and the fundamental Indigenous human right to reproductive health, dignity, and justice.

## VISION:

Our vision is to restore the sovereignty of global Indigenous wellness by honoring our human right to equitable reproductive health.

CWI is intentional in its weaving of a decolonized shared leadership model, seeking balance and harmony by prioritizing health policy, birth resiliency, and community engagement.



# meet the team

CWI's staff collaborates through a shared leadership model, working together to serve our amazing families and communities-- here are the leaders who have been part of our team in 2023!



Nicolle Gonzales

*Founder & Health Policy Director*



Shannon Fleg

*Community Engagement Director*



Jodene Nerva-Chee

*Operations Manager*



Carolina Nkouaga

*Midwifery Director*



Monica Larrea de Arrellano

*Rematriating Apprenticeship & Community Midwife*



Sara Chevallier

*Community Midwife*



Taleisa Benally

*Functional Nutrition Counselor*



Brandi Ahmie

*Health Administrator*



Felicia Otto

*Office Manager*

our incredible

# collaborators

CWI families have access to a wide network of Indigenous Healers and Medicine People as they prepare for birth, as well as connection to community-based birth assistants, body workers, and professional lactation support.



Healers & Medicine People  
*Traditional Ceremony*



Saychelle Rincon Youngberg  
*Birth Assistant & Body Work*



Natasha Bowman  
*Birth Assistant*



Hokipah Wall  
*Birth Assistant*



Marybeth Wolf  
*Body Work*



Ashley Sayers  
*IBCLC Lactation Support*



Angela Cruz  
*Healer & Hozho Healing Coordinator*

meet the

# Board



Shayai Lucero  
*President*



Shatta Garcia Mejia  
*Vice President*



Nicole Johnny  
*Treasurer*



Christy Waterman  
*Secretary*



Monica Lucero  
*Member*

Changing Woman Initiative is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that promotes reproductive wellness and healing through holistic approaches, strengthening bonds to family and community. Our Board of Directors guides our organizational vision-- Asdzáá Naadleehi (Changing Woman) represents transformation and a rebalancing of the male and female energies in the universe. We chose her name and likeness for our organization, because we look to be a force to rebalance, create harmony, and space for ceremony in all the transformations women experience in their lifetimes.



# DECOLONIZED MIDWIFERY

*programs*

WHITE SHELL WOMAN  
BIRTH SERVICES

CORN MOTHER  
EASY ACCESS CLINIC

THREE SISTERS NUTRITION  
& FARMER COLLABORATIVE

REMATRIATING APPRENTICESHIP

*philosophy of care*

- Healthcare is a Human Right
- Respect for diverse ways of knowing & learning
- We uphold breast/chest feeding as a sacred medicine for the mother and their baby
- We believe that birth, pregnancy, and motherhood is sacred and transformative
- We believe Indigenous people have the right to sovereignty over their bodies, minds, and spirits
- We believe that our sacred life way teachings are a map for how we should care for ourselves

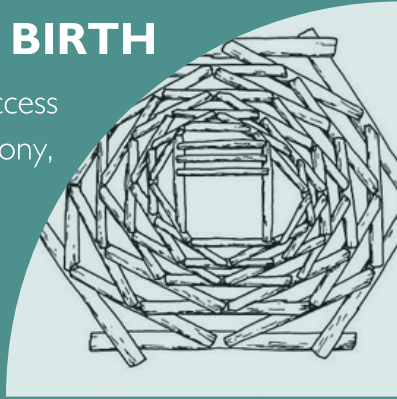


# white shell woman birth services

Our White Shell Woman birth services strives to ensure access to decolonized, Indigenous-centered, accessible healthcare and traditional childbirth options. CWI intentionally strives to center Indigenous families, hold space for other Black and Brown families, and also offer care to those who could not otherwise access midwifery care. While our midwives focus on community birth, we support families regardless of birth place.

## TRADITIONAL BIRTH

supporting families with access to plant medicine & ceremony, education on traditional birth practices, and collaborative care with Indigenous birthkeepers



## COMMUNITY BIRTH

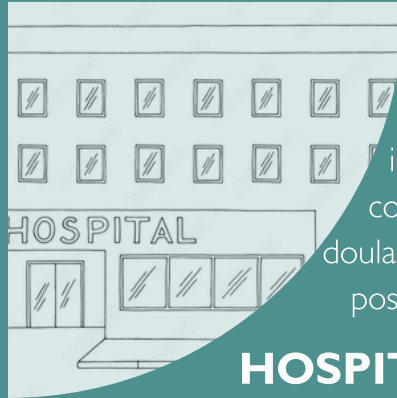
central to the services CWI provides is supporting families planning for a home birth, focusing on sovereignty, comfort, and safety for healthy pregnancies;



providing a “home away from home” birth experience, along with postpartum meals and a safe sanctuary for rest for the early days postpartum



supporting families who prefer or need to birth in a hospital setting through co-care with other clinicians, doula support, and home-based postpartum & newborn visits



## BIRTH SANCTUARY

## HOSPITAL BIRTH

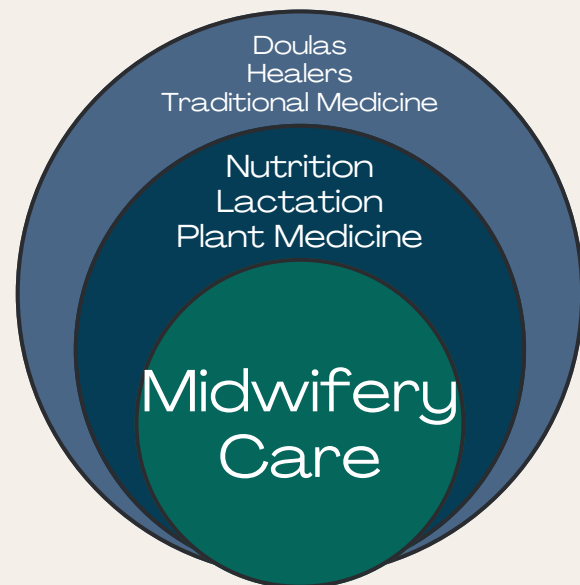
# corn mother easy access clinic

Services provided

- Well person care
- Confirmation of pregnancy
- Birth control/IUDs
- STD testing/screening/treatment
- Cultural counseling
- Lactation
- Online scheduling

# 43

clients served  
in 2023

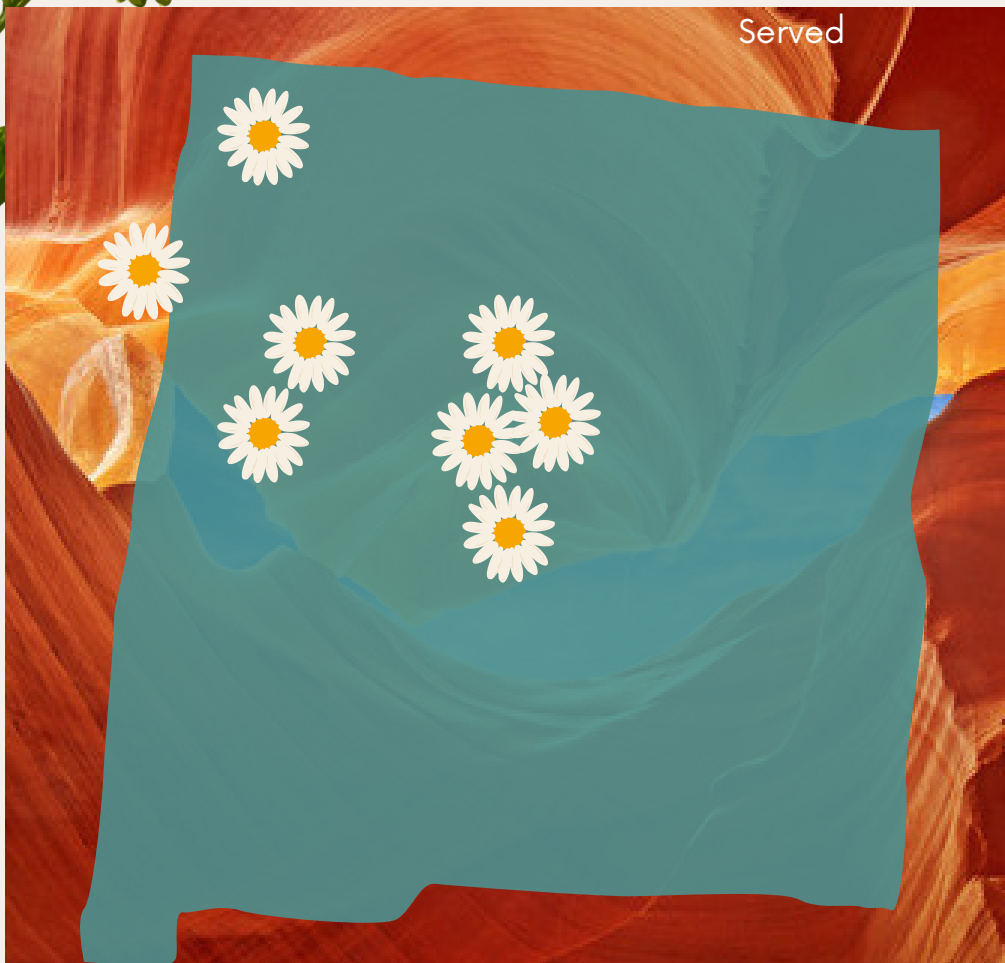




# Communities Served 2023

Families from Albuquerque, Belen, Bernalillo, Brimhall, Española, Farmington, Fence Lake, Fort Defiance, Gallup, Isleta, Los Lunas, Pojoaque, Rio Rancho, San Felipe, San Idelfonso, Santa Ana, Santa Fe, Santo Domingo, Tó Hajiileehé;

reflecting Cochiti, Diné, Kah'p'oo Owinge, Katishtya, Kewa, Mixteca, Po-Woh-Geh-Owingeh, Saginaw Chippewa, Tamaya, Tanoan, Tewa, and Wampanoag communities

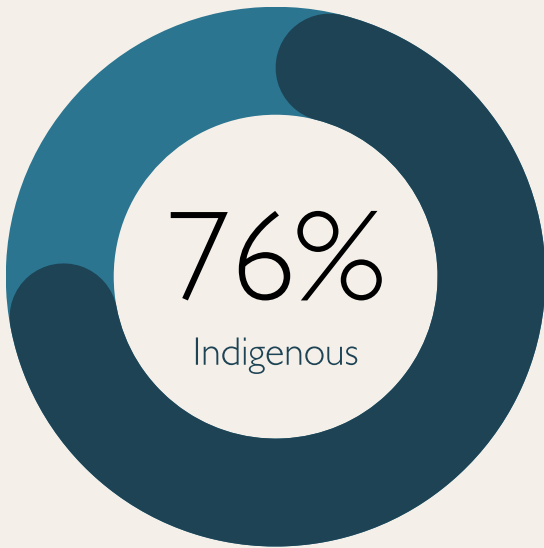


CHANGING  
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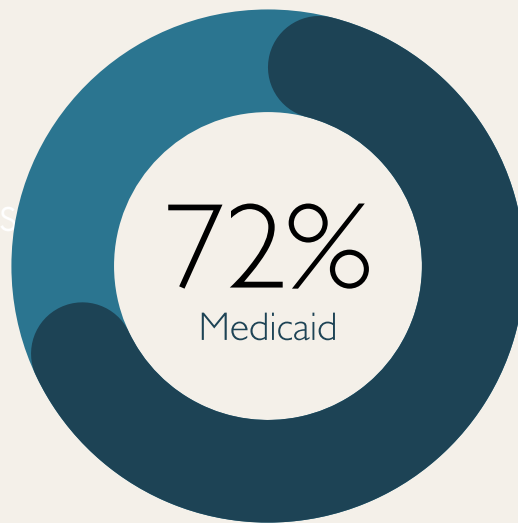
2023

# Client Demographics

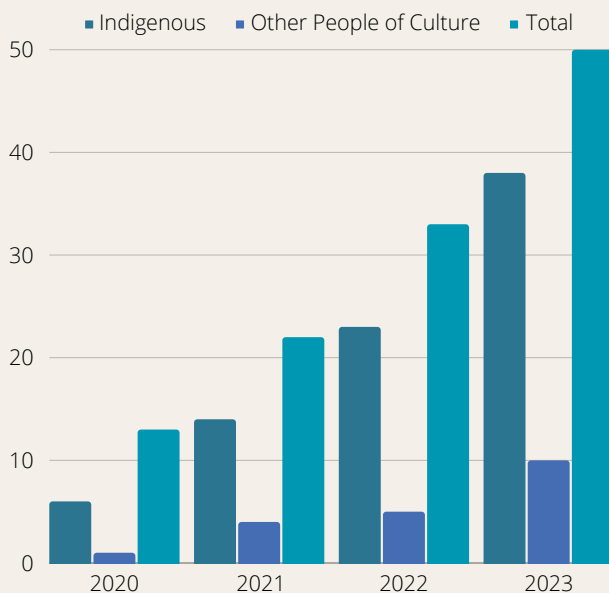
Our midwifery services continue to center Indigenous families seeking to reclaim cultural birth practices, with a special focus on those who would otherwise not have access to care.



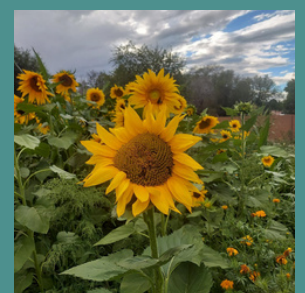
14% Black, 28% Hispanic, 4% API



4% self-pay; 20% private insurance; 4% uninsured



*White Shell Woman birth services continue to grow and serve an increasing number of families each year.*



# Three Sisters

nutrition program  
& farmer collaborative



# services provided

Recipes & Education

Produce, meats, plant medicine, supplements

Nutrition Consultation

Juices & postpartum meals

## LOCAL FARM PARTNERS

Chispas Farm  
Elate Mi Lem  
Toad's Acre Farm  
Indigenous Farm Hub  
Del Valle Organic Pecans  
Farm Flourish  
Atrisco Community Farm  
Tierra Sagrada Farm  
JX Ranch  
Red Barn Ranch

## SUPPLEMENTS & VITAMINS

Luvbelly  
Perfect Supplements  
Green Pasture  
Ancestral Supplements  
The Fittest  
Microbiome Labs

# rematriating apprenticeship



Discussions with local Indigenous midwives-- and our own experience with the challenges Indigenous midwifery apprentices face in being able to fully participate in their training-- reflect a challenging reality that few BIPOC students complete the current colonial model for midwifery training, often experiencing multiple levels of harm through the process. There is a need for short- and long-term strategies to support students on their journey to completion-- a short-term harm reduction strategy for current students and a longer-term strategy for creating a de-colonial BIPOC-centered model that serves to rematriate midwifery.

CWI is embracing the opportunity to replace the individualistic and paternalistic model with one based on rematriation. Although there are multiple pathways to midwifery licensure in NM, often only the privileged few can reach completion due to numerous systemic barriers. The gap has only widened as a result of the pandemic. Students generally enter into a model that is not equipped to support them and, even more so, will likely lead to harm. Therefore, there is a need to implement harm-reduction strategies for students currently engaged in their midwifery training and to create a BIPOC-centered model to serve students into the future. CWI is in the process of developing a more robust and sustainable decolonized apprenticeship model:

- Establish internal **harm reduction** practices and protocols
- Identify **resources** for students to assist with most common barriers: housing, food scarcity, mental health support, childcare, transportation, tuition, tribal/familial obligations, time management...
- Establish **mentorship** and other supports
- Educational **intensives** including culturally-attuned additional knowledge, wisdom, and skills to assist students in learning in a relational system, fine tuned to individual learning styles, and creating cohesion
- Determine **replicability & scalability** in the spirit of sharing and transparency



# midwifery client

# testimonials



peaceful water birth at home

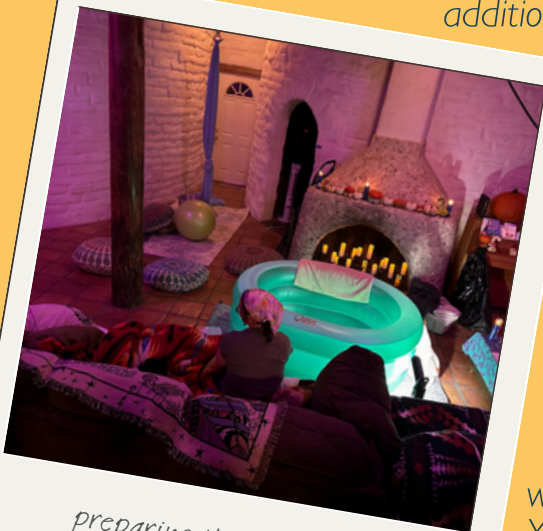
"I loved all the information they shared around natural childbirth, education and support around indigenous foods + birth practices, and the overall support for birthing practices at the mother's pace."

"I enjoy everything CWI provides, from prenatal, to nutrition, and extra benefits like Red Root. I feel like I am heard and very well taken care of with my midwives."

"I could not be more grateful for CWI. CWI provided midwifery care that was medically sound, culturally relevant and simply practical. At the time of my pregnancy, I had 3 other children 4 and under. If CWI had not provided prenatal services in my home I simply would not have been able to have a peaceful home birth. CWI removes all the silly, but real barriers to having a beautiful home birth. Barriers like childcare, transportation, cost of gas, nutrition, and other environmental factors impacting Indigenous communities have become non-issues because of the was CWI provides care."

"The care I received with CWI was the best health care I have ever had and should be the model for prenatal and birth care. I was able to have prenatal visits in my home, they were never rushed and always gave plenty of time for questions and generally building rapport. They presented all options to me (procedures, screening and testing) and allowed time for me to make decisions. I felt very well taken care of throughout my pregnancy and birth. The nutritionist was a great addition to the team. Being fed and presented with healthy local foods (as well as supplements and prenatal vitamins) was just another way that made me feel supported as a whole person. The whole team at CWI show real compassion, attention and knowledge, as well as comprehensive yet gentle guidance.

I feel that everything that CWI provided (food, education, prenatal care, calm reassurance) helped me to have the quick, uncomplicated and overall very natural birth that I was able to have. As a second time mom with CWI I would recommend them to everyone. You all are the best and I am eternally grateful."



preparing the birth space



papa  
snuggles



postpartum  
joy



stretch!



labor dancing



# ALL OUR RELATIONS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT *program*

CWI's Community Engagement program nurtured relationships with birthing families, community, health partners and family service providers by participating in several community events, health fairs, symposiums, youth events, Indigenous cultural activities, as well as speaking engagements about Indigenous health perspective on maternal and reproductive health in Native American Indian communities.



- CWI hosted and co-sponsored two (2) community health events; one for the Native American youth and families during the last week of school called “Healthy Native Youth Resource Fair” with about 150 participants, and one in the fall in partnership with the University of New Mexico Health Sciences called “Healing Together Symposium” with about 75 community participants.
- CWI promoted its White Shell Woman Home Birth Services and Corn Mother Easy Access Clinic at more than 12 community health events, and to more than 2100 community members.
- CWI also met, networked, and follow-up with more than 30 organizations representing local, state, and national organizations; sharing about the CWI organization's services.



2023 Indigenous Doula Training



fall 2023



summer 2023

# Full Spectrum Indigenous Doula Training



AUGUST 2023

## 16 doulas

Full-spectrum Indigenous doulas were trained and certified through this free-to-participants opportunity, which also included time and space for reconvening, briefing, and questions to be answered regarding serving families and even educational paths to becoming a midwife.

## 4 days

Gathering for the four-day ceremony in the modern, yet traditionally designed Dine' hogan, opened with prayer offered by a traditional practitioner, and followed by a culturally-rooted training model from Zaagi'idiwin's Indigenous trainers.

## 11 nations

Participants departed ready to serve their own communities: Zuni Pueblo, Santo Domingo Pueblo, Isleta Pueblo, Sandia Pueblo, Pueblo of Acoma, Pueblo of Laguna, Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, Indigenous Mexica, Rarámuri Huichol, Blackfeet Nation, and Diné Nation.

## 10+ partners

Thank you to our health partners who made this training a huge success: Hilton Foundation, Bold Futures, Presbyterian Health Plan, Saad Kidilye, Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute, Bob's Burger, Sprouts, Presbyterian Health Plan, and Zaagi'idiwin.

# health policy program

Like many other areas Native American Maternal & Reproductive Health is poorly represented in all health policy spaces. It is for this reason that CWI has created a health policy program to focus on five priority areas:

- Expanding **health access** for Native American people through legislative advocacy.
- Addressing **health inequalities** that disproportionately impact Native American communities.
- Building **political relationships** with tribes, state, federal, and global partners.
- Supporting **policies that are inclusive** to Indigenous midwifery & Native American communities
- Improving **health outcomes** for Native American people across the life span.

PROJECTS	DETAILS	OUTCOME
Native American Maternal & Reproductive Health Policy Virtual Summit	5 day virtual summit discussing the range of policy issues around Indigenous midwifery & NA maternal health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 200 Registered Participants</li> <li>• Many unaware of the health policy issues related to NA Maternal health</li> </ul>
United Nations 139th Session, Human Rights Committee 2023	Co-signed & advocacy, 3 Shadow Reports focused on human rights violations in NA Maternal & Repo Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations Implemented to the US.</li> <li>• UN language to support access to abortion and Indigenous midwifery in US.</li> </ul>
Recommendations to Improve NA Maternal Health	Outlined 5 Legislative recommendations to improve NA Maternal Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations shared with tribes, NIH, National Indian Health Board</li> </ul>



## Indigenous Midwifery

“CONCERNING INDIGENOUS AND BLACK MIDWIFERY PRACTICES, WHAT WILL THE U.S. DO TO PROTECT BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND OTHER CULTURAL REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN CHILDBIRTH, INCLUDING ROLLING BACK CRIMINALIZATION OF CULTURAL MIDWIFERY PRACTICES? AND IN PARTICULAR, HOW WILL IT MOVE TOWARDS EXEMPTION FROM LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS FOR RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL MIDWIFERY PRACTICES?”



United Nations  
139th Session,  
Human Rights  
Committee (CCPR)  
-2023-

Changing Woman Initiative has been hard at work collaborating with Global Indigenous Justice Groups, Center for Reproductive Rights, and Civil Society over the years and has participated in 2 United Nations Committee Hearings.

In 2022, we traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, along side 13 other Reproductive Health organizations after co-signing on to a Shadow Report that outlined these recommendations:

- **Ensure the meaningful participation of women of color in all decision-making processes that impact their reproductive health.**
- **Remove barriers to accessible high quality, comprehensive reproductive healthcare.**
- **Address and eliminate racial and intersectional discrimination in reproductive healthcare.**
- **Ensure that communities of color can access and provide culturally aligned services that improve maternal health, including midwifery and doula care.**
- **Halt and remedy retrogression of the right to abortion, and ensure abortion access.**
- **Address the impact of environmental racism on reproductive health care.**

In 2023, we participated in advocating in the 139th Session on Human Rights Committee (CCPR) and signed on to 3 Shadow reports.

- **Retrogression in U.S. Reproductive Rights: The Ongoing Fight for Reproductive Autonomy.**
- **Criminalization and Punishment for Abortion, Stillbirth, Miscarriage, and Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes.**
- **The United States Historic and Ongoing Separation of Families in Indigenous Communities, in the US Child Welfare System, and at the US-Mexico Border.**



**“US should take further steps to remove restrictive and discriminatory legal and practical barriers to midwifery care, including those affecting midwives in communities of people of African descent and Indigenous peoples”**

**Imposing a ban on traditional midwifery practices, the government is violating our right to “do as we did on our own land before we were even part of the U.S. If I am blessed to have a great-grandchild, I should be able to help birth my great-grandchild on our property.”**

**-CRR Shadow Report  
2023**

**HB955 Sovereign’s Law**

Changing Woman Initiative has been working with Pacific Birth Collective, in Maui to connect them with resources and has continued to support the traditional midwives fighting for their right to practice in their community.

During our Native American Maternal & Reproductive Health Policy Summit, we hosted a panel discussion between Kii, a Traditional Hawaiian Midwife, the Executive Director of Pacific Birth Collective, and Hawaii’s State Representative to talk about the impact this restrictive legislation is having on their communities.

In March of 2023, Traditional trained midwives in Hawaii were fighting for their right to practice after a new licensure law would take effect July 1, 2023, requiring them to be licensed as a CPM or face criminalization by practicing as unlicensed midwives in their communities.

During this week long sit in, CWI provided support to those sleeping on the sidewalks urging their legislators to pass HB955 or what is called Sovereign’s Law. This law was created to preserve the practice and legal pathway of traditional trained midwifery for future generations.

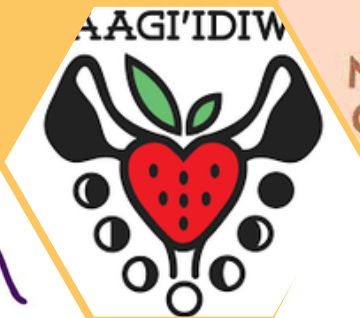
Unfortunately despite major community support and many sleepless nights on that sidewalk, HB 955 did not go beyond the Finance Committee.

Since this new licensure requirement has taken effect, only one hospital provides birth services on Maui, many families are without prenatal care and have to be flown to a near by island to birth. The Island of Maui has also experienced a devastating fire displacing many families.



# partnerships

We thank you for your continued support!



Thank you to all of our birthing families for choosing us to work with your growing family.

Thank you to our greater CWI Community for joining us in trainings, workshops, & at community events.

Thank you to our CWI Board, CWI Staff, and CWI Founder.

A big THANK YOU to all of our individual donors, to our grant funders, sponsors, and partners!



# CHANGING WOMAN INITIATIVE

*ahéhee'*

*laa waa ee*

*gho'ée'*

*muto*

*nytra*

*gracias*

*tlazocamatl*

