



GROUNDSWELL  
FUND



**With Our Minds  
on Justice  
BIRTH JUSTICE FUND**

The United States spends more than any other nation in the Global North on childbirth, yet consistently has the worst outcomes—higher rates of injury and death for birthing parents and babies, and higher likelihood of health disparities, such as low birth weight.

**According to the CDC, Black and Indigenous women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than are white women, even though most pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. are preventable.** There is virtually no research on the birthing outcomes of transgender and queer-identified parents and their babies.

**Groundswell Fund’s BIRTH JUSTICE FUND aims to eliminate disparities in pregnancy, birth, and postpartum outcomes and experiences of communities of color, low-income communities, young people, and queer and transgender people by expanding access to midwifery and doula care.**

# Birth Justice Approaches to Improving Perinatal Wellbeing & Mental Health

**“In order to center the child we must first center the parent.”**

— ANCIENT SONG DOULA SERVICES (BROOKLYN, NY)

**In 2021, Groundswell Fund’s Birth Justice Fund and Catalyst Fund for Reproductive Justice resourced 34 Black, Indigenous and People of Color organizations to support the mental health and wellbeing of birthing people of color and their babies.** Of those organizations, 47% were Black-led, 28% were Indigenous-led, 17% were Latinx-led, and 8% were led by transgender and gender-expansive communities. Located nationally, across 22 states and Tribal territories across North America, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico, these vanguard organizations provide an answer to the U.S. maternal health crisis.

**They advance the following strategies:**



## **Innovative Models**

working to increase access to transformative high-quality, cost-effective care led by midwives, doulas and other birthworkers of color to improve experiences and outcomes for pregnant, birthing and postpartum people of color.



## **Building the Pipeline of Birth Workers of Color**

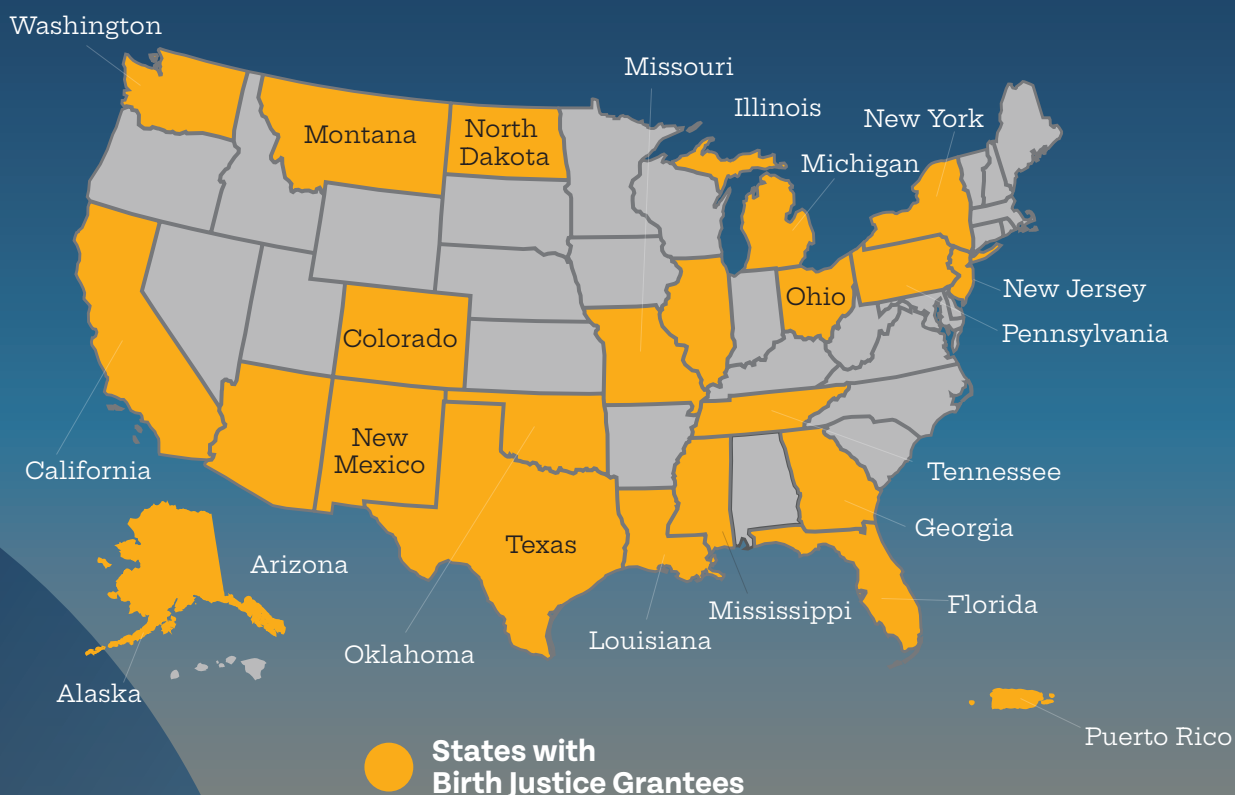
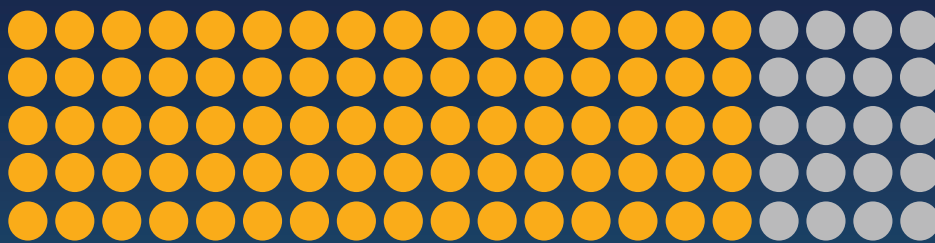
reclaiming traditional birth knowledge and training the next generation of midwives, doulas and other birth workers of color.



## **Organizing and Advocacy for Systemic Change**

organizing for social justice and community-based solutions to improve outcomes and access for birthing people of color and their babies.

of grantees **focus on**  
**mental health support**  
**for pregnant people**  
and new parents



of grantees are  
based and rooted in  
the South

**More than 20%**  
of grantees work in  
the Southwest

call the Midwest  
home

grantees name  
**environmental justice  
and climate justice  
as a critical issue**  
for supporting the  
wellbeing of pregnant  
and birthing people



# Intersectional, Multi-Issue Approach

**Groundswell grantees take an intersectional, multi-issue approach to address the mental health and wellbeing of birthing people and babies.**

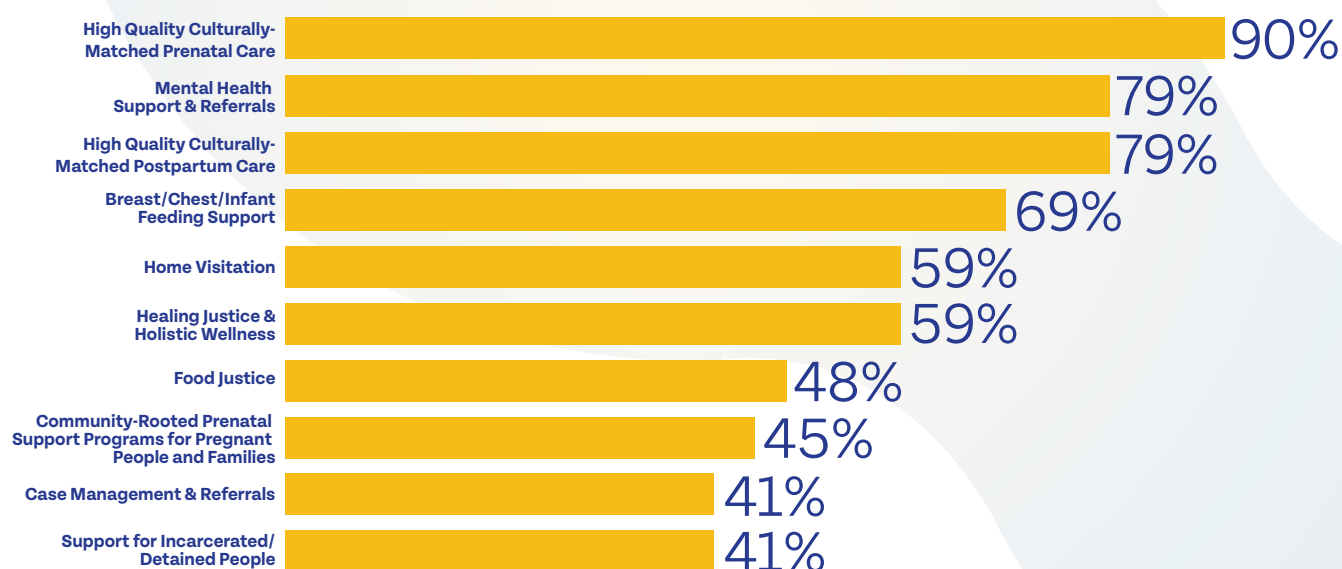
Grounded in Reproductive Justice\* principles, Birth Justice organizations understand that we cannot improve the mental health and wellbeing of pregnant, birthing, and postpartum people of color and their babies without addressing the intersecting oppressions they face.

Racism and oppression are both a stressor and trauma, particularly during the perinatal period. Reducing exposure to the stressors and trauma of racism and other forms of oppression improves mental health outcome for parents and

babies of color. Each of Groundswell's birth justice grantees advances programs and/or advocacy and organizing efforts that aim to reduce the trauma of racism and oppression in the lives of Black and Brown birthing families.

Birth justice leaders shift the conversation about equity, bodily autonomy, and self-determination. They are reclaiming traditions and knowledge that colonization, genocide, enslavement, patriarchy, and capitalism have tried to destroy. The wisdom of these traditions

## TOP 10 STRATEGIES GRANTEES USE TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH OF NEW PARENTS, BABIES, AND FAMILIES



Based on 2021 survey responses from Birth Justice Fund grantees

\*Groundswell grantee SisterSong defines Reproductive Justice as the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, to have children, to not have children, and to parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.



and knowledge remains strong and vibrant, and, in this moment of pandemic, is more important than ever.

Around 30% of grantees work on each of the following issues: **early childhood development; programs for birthing people who use substances; Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization; and infant mental health.**

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Grantees also address intersectional issues that negatively impact the mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing of new parents and babies, such as **climate change, environmental injustice, police violence, criminalization, immigration detention, food insecurity, poverty, and housing instability.**



**“We understand that supporting the birthing parent and offering loving, safe, culturally-matched care can improve the birthing experience, a sense of belonging and connection to community, access to resources, and can have long-lasting effects on the wellness and wellbeing of the parent and the child.”**

**— ALASKA NATIVE BIRTHWORKERS COMMUNITY (ANCHORAGE, AK)**

# Grantee Stories



## **Birthmark Doula Collective**

**(NEW ORLEANS, LA)**

Birthmark Doula Collective has served hundreds of birthing people and their babies in New Orleans with trauma-informed prenatal care, birth support, postpartum and lactation support. Care is delivered through a healing justice framework with a focus on Black, Indigenous and Latinx families and

facilitated in Spanish and English. The COVID-19 pandemic further stretched an already inequitable and fragmented health care system, moving Birthmark into a much more central “triage” role as many families reached out to them for support in navigating the healthcare system during the crisis and accessing different kinds of perinatal care. Birthmark is a safe space for Black and Brown communities in New Orleans facing the negative impacts of climate change, racism, classism, and oppression.

Birthmark believes in organizing for the social conditions necessary to support infant mental health, including respectful perinatal and newborn care, access to lactation care and support, paid time off for parents and caregivers, safe and secure housing and freedom from state violence.

As part of its social justice organizing efforts, Birthmark is active in Louisiana’s Perinatal Quality Collaborative which focuses on improved safety and equity for birthing people of color. Birthmark supported Black women to ensure dignity and equity for Black pregnant people in a local hospital with particularly disparate racial perinatal health outcomes. This resulted in significant changes to that hospital’s policies that will improve the experiences of Black pregnant people and reduce trauma that negatively impacts Black women’s mental health.

In addition, Birthmark has been advocating for “Momnibus” style policy changes that would support the wellbeing of pregnant and parenting people in Louisiana through increased access to equitable care, paid time off, and improvements in wages and working conditions. Through innovative services and community organizing efforts, Birthmark continues to be a home for pregnant and postpartum families of color to gather as peers, to build power, and to receive trauma-informed care and referrals that support their wellbeing and mental health.

# Policy Advocacy and Organizing

“Recently published research confirms that babies and people of color thrive when supported and treated by providers who look like them. Our reproductive and maternal justice efforts enable us to expand our community’s access to culturally-congruent perinatal providers.”

– COMMONSENSE CHILDBIRTH (WINTER GARDEN, FL)

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**Groundswell grantees were at the forefront of leading intersectional organizing and policy advocacy** to address systemic oppression that leads to disparities in health outcomes around pregnancy, birth and mental health. Highlights include:

- ⦿ **Participating in the Congressional briefing on Black Mental Health**  
(Black Mamas Matter Alliance)
- ⦿ **Developing a first-of-its-kind Emergency Care for Maternal and Child Health Plan** to inform equitable care provision -including perinatal care, contraception and abortion- during the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change emergencies such as wildfires or floods.  
(Bold Futures, Breath of My Heart Birthplace, Changing Woman Initiative, Tewa Women United)
- ⦿ **Winning six months Medicaid postpartum coverage in Georgia**  
(Black Mamas Matter Alliance)





- ⦿ **Passing the Justice & Equity in Maternity Care Act** that expands access to nurse-midwives throughout CA by removing physician supervision  
(Black Women for Wellness)
- ⦿ **Expanding access for formerly incarcerated people to the CalFresh Meal program, eliminated California healthcare co-pays for incarcerated people, and expanded diversion programs for caregivers of children under the age of 18**  
(Legal Services for Prisoners with Children)
- ⦿ **Introduced Federal Black Maternal Health Momnibus**  
(Ancient Song Doula Services, Commonsense Childbirth, Black Mamas Matter Alliance, Mamatoto Village)



**1 in 3**

of grantees **focus on addressing police and state violence**



# Grantee Stories



## Breath of My Heart Birthplace

(ESPAÑOLA, NM)

Breath of My Heart Birthplace witnessed firsthand the stresses birthing people faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Tribal and immigrant communities. When a young Indigenous parent from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo faced a difficult pregnancy, isolation, and depression due to the impacts of the pandemic, they provided life-saving support creating wraparound care for her and other vulnerable families during unprecedented times. Her mother, the main income earner in their family, fell ill with COVID which turned into a long-term condition over the months leading up to her birth.

Although there was much anxiety leading up to the birth, she had a safe and fast delivery at home in her Pueblo giving birth to a healthy baby. Breath of My Heart Birthplace midwives continue to follow her closely, helping to find additional resources for food and supplies as she manages her life with a toddler and newborn. Continuity with her midwives supported her in having a successful and healthy baby under extreme circumstances.



BLACK MAMAS MATTER ALLIANCE



## Mamatoto Village

(WASHINGTON, DC)

Due to Mamatoto Village's consistent advocacy, the Washington, D.C. City Council passed the Certified Professional Midwives Act legalizing Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) in the District and mandating coverage for out-of-hospital birth by Medicaid and loan forgiveness for CPMs working in high needs communities.

Mamatoto also co-leads Washington D.C.'s Maternal Mortality Review Committee - the only one in the nation to be co-led by two midwives and to actively use a racial and reproductive justice framework to craft recommendations to address maternal mortality and morbidity in the District.

Throughout the pandemic and in response to the Black Lives Matter racial reckoning, Mamatoto Village remained committed to empowering Black womxn and families across the D.C. area, serving 313 clients, completing 3,440 telehealth visits, maintaining a 90% client engagement rate, and a 0% maternal and infant mortality rate.



## Black Women for Wellness

(LOS ANGELES, CA)

Working on several pieces of legislation aimed at closing the maternal and infant mortality and morbidity gap, Black Women for Wellness leads the way. This includes passing SB 65/ California Momnibus Bill: the first-of-its-kind implicit bias training for all perinatal staff, updating data

collection to identify disparities and pregnancy-related deaths, requiring hospitals to inform patients about how to file discrimination complaints, and expanding access to nurse-midwives by removing physician supervision of Certified Nurse Midwives. These victories will result in concrete improvements in experiences and outcomes for Black and Brown pregnant, birthing, and postpartum people. Racism is both a stressor and trauma for people of color, particularly during pregnancy, labor, and the postpartum period. Winning implicit-bias training for all perinatal staff in California is a huge victory that will reduce racism and support improved mental health outcomes for Black and Brown parents and infants.





A list of Birth Justice Fund grantees can be found by visiting [groundswellfund.org](https://groundswellfund.org). Lists can be filtered via fund, geography, issue, and strategy.



## GROUNDSWELL FUND



For more information about our Birth Justice Fund, please contact **Naa Hammond**, Senior Director of Grantmaking at [nhammond@groundswellfund.org](mailto:nhammond@groundswellfund.org).



[GROUNDSWELLFUND.ORG](https://groundswellfund.org)