

## Coverage Extended to Midwives

TENILLE TELLMAN  
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The Alberta government's decision to expand health care coverage to midwifery is going to radically change the face of maternity care, local doulas say.

Alberta Health and Wellness announced Thursday midwives would be brought fully into the public health system. Effective April 1, 2009, expectant mothers who choose to have their babies with the assistance of a midwife will have that service covered.

Local doula Michelle Maisonville, founder and president of Women's Options in Maternity Care and Birth (WOMB) was pleased to hear the news, adding midwifery services are badly needed in our area.

"Part of me wishes I would have been able to have the home birth I wanted with my second child," said Maisonville.

Local certified childbirth doula Loree Siermachesky has been waiting for the announcement for eight years because she wants to become a midwife. Doulas don't do anything medical, but she wants to take her experience assisting families through their pregnancies another step forward.

"I knew once Saskatchewan covered it, Alberta wouldn't be too far behind," said Siermachesky.

Funding midwives will change the face of medical care because the costs were far too high previously. Some women were choosing to have free-births at home with no medical expertise but now they can have the best of both sides.

Midwives have been around longer than the medical profession, so many mothers believe in the process of birth as something one does in their own home with this assistance, she added.

"This area has been screaming for a midwife for about five years and there are none that practice here."

Increasing the number of midwives in the province will also reduce the strain on the medical system so physicians are able to focus on more of the high-risk pregnancies, says Siermachesky.

But the transition in Medicine Hat could be a little slower for acceptance, said Maisonville, adding she dreams of seeing a birth centre available here in the next 10 years.

There are approximately 30 midwives currently practicing in the province, and most have been recruited internationally. With only three Canadian locations available for

this kind of training — and limited seats for students — another educational program is hoping to help get things started.

The Alberta Midwifery Health Disciplines Committee (AMHDC) is part of a multi-jurisdictional pilot project offering a midwifery bridging program. The seven-month program is designed to assess midwives who have been educated outside of Canada and assist in bridging their education with Canadian standards. There are 25 spaces available for the program and chair Diane Rach wants to see six from Alberta enroll.

“If the midwives are going to be able to make a meaningful contribution to the maternity care of Alberta mothers, we need more of them,” said Rach.

The deadline for application to the project, which can be accessed online at [www.midwiferybridging.ca](http://www.midwiferybridging.ca) is Oct. 19. It is being hosted in collaboration with the University of British Columbia and Mount Royal College.

Eventually, they hope to form a provincial college under the Health Professions Act, she added.

The Alberta Health Services board will receive \$4 million for midwifery service implementation across the province for the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Government and the board will develop and establish a structure that provides full midwifery services to all Alberta women with low-risk pregnancies in a variety of locations including hospitals, community birthing centers, or in their homes.