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New Study Shows Birth Centers Have 80% Lower C-Section Rate Than National Average

(Seattle, WA) This month, the “Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health” published the National Birth Center Study II, a new study from the American Association of Birth Centers. This study updates findings from the first research project, conducted over twenty years ago.

The study highlighted two remarkable findings: the low rate of cesarean births and the very low rate of fetal and newborn deaths. In 2011 the national average was approximately 30% for cesarean births, but only 6% for births taking place in birth centers. The findings indicate that the midwives practicing at these birth centers are providing exceptional high-quality, low-intervention care to women and their newborns.

Distinct from hospitals, a free-standing birth center is a home-like environment where women seeking natural, unmedicated childbirth can be attended by a Licensed Midwife or a Certified Nurse Midwife. Medicaid and most other health insurance plans in WA State cover the cost of midwifery care.

Washington has been a national leader in the re-emergence of home and birth center births since the 70's. Birth certificate data indicates that 1.2% of the total births in WA in 2011 occurred at birth centers (or 1.6% of the total births in the 9 counties where birth centers are located)—a much higher rate of birth center births than the 0.3% found in this study nationwide.

Authors of the National Birth Center Study II determined that over \$30 million was saved in the costs of facility fees and potentially avoided cesareans by the women who chose to deliver in these birth centers. Billions of dollars in savings every year would result if only 10% of mothers were giving birth in a midwife-led birth center.

This study is an important contribution to the literature on birth center outcomes.

For more information on free-standing birth centers and midwifery in Washington state, visit the Washingtonmidwives.org website. Or contact Valerie Sasson LM, CPM, MAWS president at 206-406-8787.

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National Birth Center Study II: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jmwh.12003/full>

American Association of Birth Centers: www.birthcenters.org

The Midwives' Association of Washington State works to promote the health and well-being of women and babies through the development and support of the profession of midwifery. For more information about MAWS, visit our web site at www.washingtonmidwives.org.