

Introduction to Midwifery

Objective

To describe the practice of midwifery and how it is being expanded in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) and present results of a review of the first year of the Central Midwifery program.

Practice Points

1. Midwives are registered primary health care providers specializing in pregnancy, birth, postpartum and newborn care.
2. The practice of midwifery was reintroduced to NL in 2019, with the first practice opening in Central NL. Presently, midwifery services are available in central and eastern rural NL, with plans for expansion of services to all five health zones.

3. The profession of midwifery is regulated by the Newfoundland and Labrador Council of Health Professionals (NLCHP), which works in partnership with the College of Midwives of Newfoundland and Labrador (CMNL) to uphold professional standards and is responsible for addressing complaints and concerns from the public.
4. The expansion of midwifery in the province is supported by Health Accord NL and was included in the 2023/2024 provincial budget.
5. In 2021, the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information (NLCHI)* conducted an evaluation of the first year of the Central Midwifery Program.

*NLCHI is now part of NL Health Services.

Background

Education Pathways	Service Provision	Philosophy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a four-year Bachelor of Health Sciences in Midwifery degree • Complete one year of post-graduate mentored practice and pass the National Midwifery Registration Exam • Internationally educated and experienced midwives complete a Canadian bridging program and pass the National Midwifery Registration Exam • Innu Round Table Secretariat has a community-based midwifery program for Innu of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish (this program is currently in its third year) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government-funded, primary health care providers • Provide comprehensive perinatal care from conception to six weeks postpartum for birthing parent and newborn • Can provide other care including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ preconception care and assessments ◊ contraception counselling, prescribing, and administration ◊ pregnancy testing and counselling ◊ cervical cancer and STI screening ◊ with additional training, may provide vacuum extraction, IUD insertions, and surgical assistance in Cesaerean sections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based practice • Considered specialists of physiologic birth • Work in collaboration with clients, prioritizing a non-authoritarian relationship and integrating social and cultural aspects of clients' lives • Prioritize informed choice, including choice of birthplace • Scope of practice is supportive of providing clients with provider continuity from prenatal through the postpartum period

Figure 1. Pillars of the Profession of Midwifery

Data

Data obtained from the 2021 NLCHI evaluation of the Central Midwifery Program.

Results

- One-Year Evaluation of Central Midwifery Program:
 - ◊ Majority of clients had immediate skin-to-skin contact with their babies at birth.
 - ◊ 94% of clients initiated breastfeeding, of which 77% were still exclusively breastfeeding at six months (provincial rate=16%).
 - ◊ 50% of clients were discharged from hospital in under 24 hours.
 - ◊ 20% of clients were discharged from hospital after one night.
 - ◊ All clients surveyed reported extremely high rates of satisfaction with midwifery services.

- The provincial government’s expansion plan for midwifery includes expanding the availability of midwives to all five health zones across the province via five sites (see Table 1 for details).

Conclusions

1. The first-year evaluation of the midwifery program in Gander had positive results in terms of fewer rates of intervention, reducing length of hospital stay, and increased breastfeeding initiation compared to provincial averages. There were extremely high rates of satisfaction reported from clients.
2. The expansion of midwifery services across the province offers individuals greater choice in perinatal and newborn care, as well as support for birth outside of a hospital setting.
3. Additional information on midwifery can be found at:
 - ◊ <https://nlhealthservices.ca/servicelisting/midwifery/>
 - ◊ <https://www.amnl.ca/>
 - ◊ <https://www.cmnl.ca/>
 - ◊ <http://canadianmidwives.org>

Table 1. Location of Midwifery Programs (Current and Planned as of Nov 2025)

Location of Program	Date Established	Number of Midwives
Gander – Central Program	2019	4 FTEs
Carbonear – Eastern Rural Program	Aug 2024	4 FTEs (3 filled, one vacancy)
St John’s – Eastern Urban Program	Pending	4 FTEs recruiting
Happy Valley-Goose Bay – Labrador-Grenfell Program	In progress	3 FTEs recruiting
Corner Brook – Western Program	TBD	Plan for 4 FTEs

*FTE-Full Time Equivalent