INTRODUCTION

With over 3.5 million births in the United States annually, and rising rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, there is ample opportunity to improve maternal outcomes across the country. More than 2 million women of childbearing age live in maternity care deserts, areas without access to birthing facilities or maternity care providers. Access to maternity care is essential for preventing poor health outcomes and eliminating health disparities. This report expands on the 2022 Nowhere to Go: Maternity Care Deserts Across the U.S. report by taking a deeper dive into state level data and examining additional barriers that impact access to care. This data can be used to inform policies and practice recommendations in each state.

This report presents data on several important factors: levels of maternity care access and maternity care deserts by county; distance to birthing hospitals; availability of family planning services; community level factors associated with prenatal care usage as well as the burden and consequences of chronic health conditions across the state. While not an exhaustive list, each of these topics contribute to the complexity of maternity care access in each state. Working to improve access to maternity care by bringing awareness to maternity care deserts and other factors that limit access is one way in which March of Dimes strives to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity for all pregnant people.

ACCESS TO MATERNITY CARE IN MISSISSIPPI

Access to care during pregnancy and around the time of birth is not consistently available across the country. Hospital closures and a shortage of providers are driving changes in maternity care access, especially within rural areas and among Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). The level of maternity care access within each county is classified across Mississippi by the availability of birthing facilities, maternity care providers, and the percent of uninsured women (see table). The map shows that in Mississippi, 51.2 percent of counties are defined as maternity care deserts compared to 32.6 percent in the U.S. overall.

FINDINGS

- In Mississippi, there was a 5.4% increase in the number of birthing hospitals between 2020 and 2019.
- In Mississippi, there were 8,148 babies born in maternity care deserts, 23.2% of all births.
- 34.7% of babies were born to women who live in rural counties, while 25.2% of maternity care providers practice in rural counties in Mississippi.

DEFINITIONS OF MATERNITY CARE DESERT AND LEVEL OF MATERNITY CARE ACCESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Maternity care desert</th>
<th>Low access</th>
<th>Moderate access</th>
<th>Full access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals and birth centers offering obstetric care</td>
<td>zero</td>
<td>&lt;2</td>
<td>&lt;2</td>
<td>≥2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstetric providers (obstetrician, family physician*, CNM/CM per 10,000 births)</td>
<td>zero</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
<td>≥60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of women 18-64 without health insurance</td>
<td>any</td>
<td>≥10%</td>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
<td>any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Area Health Resources Files, 2022; American Board of Family Medicine, 2017-2020; National Center for Health Statistics, 2021 final natality data.

Note: CNM/CM = certified nurse midwives/certified midwives.
*A county is full access if it meets one or more of the criteria.
*Includes family physicians who provide obstetric care.

WHERE YOU LIVE MATTERS: MATERNITY CARE DESERTS AND THE CRISIS OF ACCESS AND EQUITY

March of Dimes recommends state policy actions that address access to care; see: https://marchofdimes.org/mcdr-ms

For details on data sources and calculations, see Technical Notes: https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/maternalcaretechnotes

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DISTANCE TO MATERNITY CARE

The farther a woman travels to receive maternity care, the greater the risk of maternal morbidity and adverse infant outcomes, such as stillbirth and NICU admission. Furthermore, longer travel distances to care can cause financial strain on families and increased prenatal stress and anxiety. The distance a woman must travel to access care becomes a critical factor during pregnancy, at the time of birth, and in the case of emergencies. Nationwide closures of birthing hospitals have contributed to increased distance and travel time to care, especially in rural areas.

Mapping software was utilized to calculate distance, in miles and minutes, under normal traffic conditions and using real-world travel routes. The map indicates the average distance to the closest birthing hospital throughout Mississippi. Commonly used thresholds of 30- and 60-minute driving times were applied to measure the percent of birthing people with timely access to care. This information can help identify areas where resources are needed to improve access to care. Overall, in the U.S. women travel 9.7 miles to their nearest birthing hospital.

FINDINGS

- In Mississippi, women travel 15.6 miles and 20.5 minutes, on average, to their nearest birthing hospital.
- Women living in counties with the highest travel times (top 20 percent) could travel up to 51.8 miles and 55.7 minutes, on average, to reach their nearest birthing hospital.
- Under normal traffic conditions, 0% of women live over 60 minutes from their nearest birthing hospital compared to 1.0% in the U.S.
- 24.3% of women in Mississippi had no birthing hospital within 30 minutes.
- In rural areas across Mississippi, 31.5% of women live over 30 minutes from a birthing hospital compared to 20.2% of women living in urban areas.
- Women living in maternity care deserts traveled 3.2 times farther than women living in areas with full access to maternity care in Mississippi.

On average, women in Mississippi travel 15.6 miles to the nearest birthing hospital.

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Access to family planning services allows for people to achieve their goals around having children, including the timing of and spacing between pregnancies. An unexpected pregnancy or too little time between pregnancies can lead to serious health consequences, including preterm birth, depression, and anxiety. Providing access to affordable contraceptives is a strategy to help people attain their family planning goals. Title X clinics are federally funded healthcare sites that provide low-cost reproductive healthcare services including contraceptives, wellness exams, and breast and cervical cancer screenings. The map displays Title X locations and areas where women are vulnerable to poor outcomes due to lack of access to reproductive health services. County level risk data are derived from Surgo's U.S. Maternal Vulnerability Index (MVI), where a darker color indicates greater vulnerability. Women in Mississippi have a high vulnerability to adverse outcomes due to the availability of reproductive healthcare services.

**DISPARITIES IN PRENATAL CARE**

Early and regular prenatal care (PNC) is an important strategy for reducing the risk of pregnancy complications and adverse birth outcomes. Historically, BIPOC have lower rates of adequate PNC and may be less likely to receive services such as important health screenings and appropriate monitoring of baby’s growth. Community level factors, such as poverty, create barriers to accessing care that can worsen the disparity in PNC usage among BIPOC. The impact of poverty on PNC usage was assessed by examining the percent of women receiving inadequate PNC in areas of high and low poverty. In Mississippi, 13.9 percent of women received inadequate PNC compared to 14.8 percent in the U.S.

**FINDINGS**

- 1.8% of BIPOC did not receive PNC in areas of high poverty.
- Among BIPOC, those living in areas of high poverty have a 23% increased likelihood of inadequate PNC when compared to those living in areas of low poverty.
- Hispanic women living in areas of high poverty are 1.3 times more likely to receive inadequate PNC compared to those in areas of low poverty.

**INADEQUATE PREGNATAL CARE BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND POVERTY**

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**CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS AND PRETERM BIRTH**

Having a chronic health condition before pregnancy increases the risk of pregnancy and postpartum complications. Preterm birth (PTB), a delivery before 37 weeks gestation, is one example of a complication that can lead to serious health impacts. The burden of chronic health conditions among birthing people is increasing across the U.S.\(^6\),\(^8\). Access to healthcare before, during, and after pregnancy is important for appropriate management of chronic health conditions. At the time of birth, women with chronic conditions and their babies may need access to higher-level care, such as specialized providers, hospitals with the ability to perform a Cesarean birth, or hospitals with NICUs. Examining the chronic health burden (CHB) across Mississippi and its relationship to adverse outcomes provides information needed to make important changes that can result in targeted resource allocation, prevention, and appropriate disease management.

The percent of birthing people with one or more chronic conditions was calculated for each county in Mississippi and overall. The following conditions were included due to their availability in birth record data and established association with PTB: pre-pregnancy hypertension and diabetes, smoking, and being underweight or obese before pregnancy. The map describes the county level CHB in relation to the PTB rate. Areas shaded in purple have both a high CHB, greater than the overall state percent, and a high rate of PTB, defined as greater than the national target of 9.4 percent.\(^9\) In Mississippi, the PTB rate was 15.0 percent, compared to 10.5 percent in the U.S. overall in 2021.

**FINDINGS**
- In Mississippi, 47.8% of women had one or more chronic health conditions compared to 37.8% in the U.S. overall.
- Women with one or more chronic health conditions have a 39% increased likelihood of having a preterm birth compared to those without any chronic health conditions.
- 81.7% of counties in Mississippi have a high burden of chronic health conditions and a high rate of preterm birth.

**SUMMARY**

All women deserve healthcare which is safe, effective, timely, efficient and equitable. Consistent and equitable access to maternity care helps women maintain optimal health as well as reduce the risk of experiencing complications during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Several factors influence maternity care access for women across the U.S. By assessing distance to care and the availability of maternity care providers, hospitals and family planning services, this report provides insight into several physical components that affect a person’s ability to receive care. In addition, examining community level factors associated with access to care and identifying vulnerable populations provides greater context around barriers to receiving appropriate care. Together this information can lead decision makers, public health professionals, clinicians and researchers to advocate for policies and resources that increase maternity care access across each state.

By addressing these factors, states may move closer to eliminating pregnancy-related deaths and complications. Telehealth, through various platforms, equips maternal health providers with the tools to better facilitate care before, during and after pregnancy and has been shown to not only increase access but also improves patient engagement and treatment.\(^20\) March of Dimes fully supports Congress, governmental regulating agencies and states to act and make telehealth provisions balanced and permanent. Evidence-based telehealth services and other innovative solutions are explored in greater depth on page 5.

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POLICY AND PROGRAM INNOVATION

- Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies of Mississippi is a care management organization working to ensure that all Mississippi moms and babies have access to care. The program provides a multidisciplinary support team to assist moms and babies in all 82 Mississippi counties who have identified health risks. The program helps participants find a medical home, identify community supports, provide referrals for social programs and social services, and health education.24

- Mississippi Center for Emergency Services' STORK Program trains and equips first responders and medical professionals to respond to and treat obstetric emergencies. The medical professionals enrolled in the STORK Program, which include emergency room doctors and nurses, lack specialized obstetrics training to handle pregnancy and delivery complications like hypertension and hemorrhage. The program is essential in a rural state with dwindling options for obstetrical care due to the closure of rural hospitals and rural labor and delivery wards.25

- The Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program (MRPSP), recruits rural college students who aspire to return to their rural communities to practice medicine. The program provides academic enrichment opportunities, faculty and physician mentoring, and medical school financial support. This program works to address the challenge of Mississippi's healthcare, including maternal care, crisis.26

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