



Improve Access to Rural Maternal Care Services

Texas' rural maternal health care system teeters perilously close to crisis.

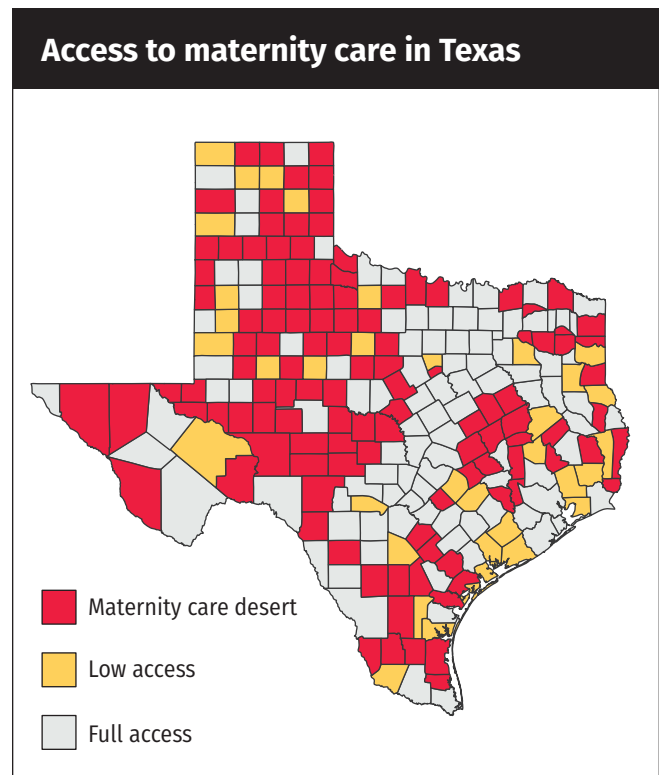
In Texas 47% of counties are "maternity care deserts," lacking OB care services entirely, compared to 33% nationally. The March of Dimes defines maternity care deserts as counties that have no hospitals providing obstetric care and no practicing obstetrical clinicians.

- 20% of Texas women receive inadequate or no prenatal care, compared to 14.8% nationally. In rural counties, the rate is even higher.
- 28% of rural Texas mothers live 30 minutes or more from a maternity care facility.

Family medicine is the linchpin for providing access to primary care, preventive care, mental health, and maternity care in rural and underserved communities.

Of all providers, family physicians are most likely to practice in rural areas due to the breadth of their training across various medical disciplines, including pediatric, adult medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, and mental health.

According to the Robert Graham Center, family physicians deliver babies in more than 40% of all U.S. counties, and more than half of these counties are in nonmetropolitan areas. Family physicians are the sole maternity care clinicians delivering babies in 16% of maternity care deserts across the country.



Source: March of Dimes. Where You Live Matters: Maternity Care in Texas

For family physician residents seeking additional maternity and women's health care training, there are only five FMOB fellowships available in Texas and only 48 fellowships in the entire United States.

FMOB fellowships are 13-month programs that train family physicians to care for obstetric patients. This includes evaluating patients and managing their care before, during, and after pregnancy. These fellowships train family doctors to manage maternity care complications in resource-limited areas, many even providing training in Cesarean delivery, so they can be a key part of filling the OB care gap.

We respectfully request that the Legislature establish a Family Medicine Obstetrics Fellowship grant program at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and allocate \$5 million to support the state's five existing FMOB programs and to establish 10 new FMOB programs.

Family Medicine Obstetrics Fellowships and Family Medicine Residency Programs Can Improve Access to Maternal Care

Lack of access to primary and maternal care threatens Texas' rural communities.

- In 2021, out of the 214 Texas counties lacking sufficient primary care, 74% (159) were rural.
- 71 rural Texas counties lack a hospital. Among hospitals still providing labor and delivery services, 59% report financial losses for each service.
- 25% of rural Texas women lack health insurance.

The lack of local maternity care harms the health of mothers, babies, and rural communities.

Women who must travel long distances for preventive care or labor and delivery are more likely than their urban counterparts to suffer severe complications, or worse.

Promoting better birth outcomes boosts economic productivity, especially in rural Texas communities, which generate more than \$20 billion in annual revenue. The future of these communities depends on their ability to attract young families, who are reluctant to live in a place lacking maternal health care.

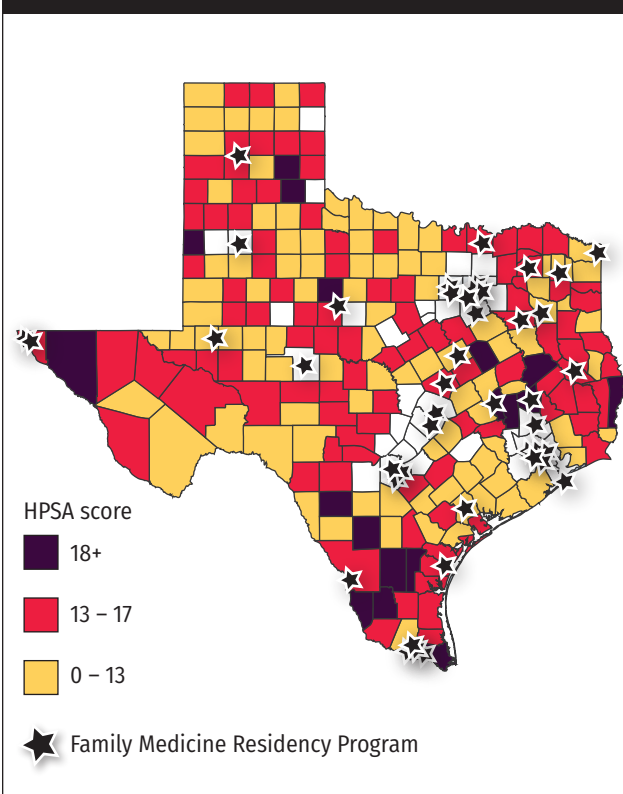
Providing additional OB training to family doctors will increase access to maternal care in rural communities.

Texas' family medicine residency programs are the lifeblood of our primary care workforce, preparing more than 300 new family physicians each year to care for patients.

- 70% of family doctors who complete residency in Texas stay in Texas.
- Residency program clinics deliver well-coordinated, cost-effective care, much of it for Medicaid and CHIP patients, Medicare patients, and the uninsured.

Unlike states with large rural populations like Colorado and Kansas, Texas has limited graduate medical education opportunities for family medicine residents seeking additional maternal and women's health care training. We know that out-of-state programs have succeeded in attracting Texas family medicine residents who wanted to be FMOBs here.

Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) and the distribution of family medicine residency programs



Source: Texas Department of State Health Services Health Professional Shortage Area Dashboard

Establishing a Family Medicine Obstetrics Fellowship grant program at the THECB goes hand in hand with the proposals in the 2025 Rural Texas Maternal Health Rescue Plan. Scan to visit the Texas A&M Rural and Community Health Institute's Rural Texas Maternal Health Initiative.

