



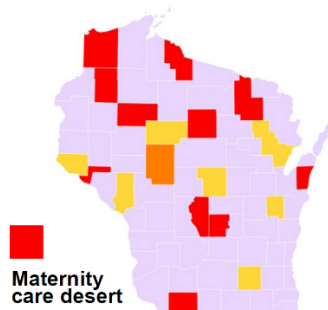
Making Sure Every Woman in Wisconsin Has a Place to Give Birth

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Did you know that in some parts of Wisconsin, women have to travel up to two hours to reach a hospital that delivers babies? That's a long drive—especially if labor starts unexpectedly or if emergency help is needed.

Maternity Care Deserts

- 11 out of Wisconsin's 72 counties are considered to be maternity care deserts.
- 3.0% (1,788) of infants were born to mothers who lived in a maternity care desert.
- 0.3% (196) of infants were born in a maternity care desert.



Data source: March of Dimes, 2023; Wisconsin Vital Records, 2024

These areas are called maternity care deserts—places where there are no hospitals, birth centers, or OB/GYNs nearby. According to the March of Dimes, about 15% of Wisconsin counties are maternity care deserts. Across the state, over 1,800 pregnant women each year live in these areas, facing challenges in planning for their prenatal care and birth.

I recently attended the Wisconsin Association for Perinatal Care (WAPC) Conference in Oshkosh, WI, where a particularly serious concern in rural Wisconsin's maternity deserts was highlighted. In the absence of nearby hospitals equipped for obstetric care and limited training and resources for managing childbirth in the field, local EMS teams are sometimes unable to transport laboring patients safely. As a result, pregnant women in these regions may find themselves without timely access to emergency care during one of the most critical moments of their pregnancy.

Why This Matters for the HOPE Consortium

For pregnant women, especially those navigating challenges related to substance use, access to timely, supportive care is critical. Traveling long distances for appointments or deliveries can:

- Make it harder to attend prenatal or substance use disorder treatment appointments
- Delay access to emergency care in critical situations
- Increase stress and anxiety, which can impact both maternal and infant health



When maternity care deserts intersect with substance use challenges, the risks can multiply. HOPE Consortium works to ensure that women receive compassionate care, including both prenatal support and substance use treatment, no matter where they live.

How HOPE Consortium Supports Women

Since 2020, the HOPE Consortium has connected partners across Wisconsin to help pregnant women facing substance use challenges. HOPE Consortium works to:

- Link women to local healthcare providers and treatment programs using our Rapid Response Team Phone Line available at:
<https://hopeconsortium.org/perinatalproject/>
- Provide coordination across counties using resource guides available on our website, which can be found under Where to Turn for Help at:
<https://hopeconsortium.org/>
- Support safe birth planning with trained Doulas who are listed on a resource guide available at: <https://hopeconsortium.org/perinatalproject/>
- Offer risk reduction and reproductive health supplies

By addressing both substance use and access barriers, HOPE Consortium is helping women have safer pregnancies, healthier babies, and stronger families, even in communities far from hospitals or birth centers.