

BRIEF

Rural America's OB deserts widen in fallout from pandemic

| DEC 19, 2023

<https://www.chartis.com/insights/rural-americas-ob-deserts-widen-fallout-pandemic>

As hospital closures and the loss of inpatient care continue to rattle rural communities, many of these communities are now also part of expanding "care deserts"—large swaths of rural America (sometimes covering thousands of square miles) where access to specific services such as obstetrics (OB) does not exist.

New analysis into the loss of access to OB conducted by The Chartis Center for Rural Health indicates that 267 rural hospitals stopped providing access to OB services between 2011 and 2021. While rural hospital closures may have slowed during the pandemic, the same cannot be said of rural OB units. During the peak years of the pandemic (2020 and 2021), 63 rural hospitals eliminated OB services.

With the loss of nearly 25% of America's rural OB units, expecting mothers now face longer travel times for OB care, which poses increased risk especially in the event of an emergency. Although some legislative efforts and hybrid models are promising, the Dobbs decision appears likely to further chip away at access to OB services and maternal care in many states hardest hit by rural health safety net instability.

"Such a high number of OB unit closures in this 2-year window is indicative of not only the financial strain created by the pandemic but also the impact of staffing shortages, particularly at the nurse level, on the delivery of care."

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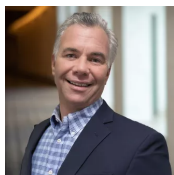
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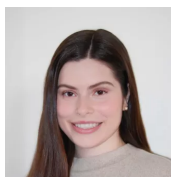
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