

Strengthening Perinatal Care Access in Colorado:

Strategies to Mitigate Birth Facility Closures



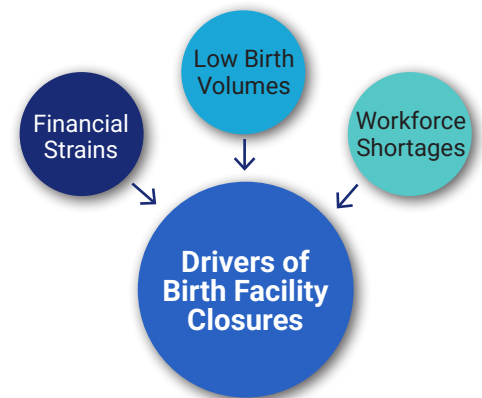
Access to perinatal care, including access to a birth facility, is a key determinant of maternal and infant health. Barriers to accessing high-quality perinatal care can contribute to delayed or inadequate prenatal care, unmanaged conditions, and higher risks of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality.

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birth facilities (hospital L&D units and birth centers) in Colorado closed in 2024 and 2025.

98% of Coloradans live in an area with an **inadequate supply of prenatal health care.**

40% of Colorado counties are designated as **maternity care deserts.**

- **Birth facility closures across Colorado limit access to timely and risk-appropriate perinatal care.** The impacts of closures are greater in rural areas of Colorado, where communities have fewer options for safe, high-quality, and timely perinatal care.
- **Most birth facilities are concentrated in the Denver Metro and Front Range regions.**
- **Financial strains, workforce shortages, and low birth volumes challenge the viability of birth facilities.** Rural facilities are hit hardest: low patient numbers don't generate the revenue needed to cover high, 24/7 fixed operational costs.



Impacts of Birth Facility Closures on Access to Perinatal Care



Increased Distance to Care. Closures increase travel time to perinatal care, especially in rural parts of the state.



Poor Perinatal Outcomes. Closures can hinder timely treatment of complications, including severe maternal morbidity, and lead to gaps in care that increase maternal and infant risks, such as higher rates of preterm and unplanned out-of-hospital births.



Reduced Perinatal Workforce. Closures result in job loss for local staff and providers and increase workload demands for staff and providers at facilities absorbing patients from the closing facility.



Hurts Local Economy. Closures can destabilize the local economy by driving out health care professionals and families.



Colorado Assets to Build on for Improving Access to the Perinatal System of Care:

- Robust pipeline of family medicine obstetrics physicians (FMOBs)
- Supportive midwifery policies
- Resources to support families during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum

Recommendations to Support a Resilient Perinatal System of Care

Strategies to ensure access to safe, high-quality perinatal care throughout Colorado



1. Strengthen the Perinatal System of Care

- Establish Levels of Maternal Care and designate birth facilities accordingly.
- Form regional transfer and consultation networks between low-acuity and high-acuity birth facilities.
- Prepare emergency departments and other non-obstetric settings for perinatal emergencies with training, equipment, and transfer protocols.
- Explore implementation of standby perinatal units.
- Expand perinatal home visiting programs.



2. Invest in the Perinatal Care Workforce

- Grow the rural perinatal hospital-based workforce by expanding use of FMOBs, certified nurse midwives, and certified registered nurse anesthetists.
- Sustain clinical competence in low-volume birth facilities with cross-institutional clinical rotations and case-based learning.
- Support the community midwifery workforce with regulatory structures and requirements that enable their full scope of practice.



3. Structure Financing and Reimbursement to Support Rural Birth Facilities

- Create an early warning system that identifies rural birth facilities at risk of closure.
- Establish regional collaboration between hospitals and other rural health providers to support resource and service sharing, care coordination, and improved efficiency.
- Implement a standby capacity payment to support Colorado's rural hospital L&D units.
- Support the rural perinatal hospital-based workforce during the transition to per service reimbursement for perinatal care services.



Read the legislative report for a summary of the findings and recommendations to address the negative effects of birth facility closures and strengthen Colorado's perinatal system of care. Visit jsi.org/co-perinatal-access-report.

To view Birth Facility Closure Best Practice Guidelines, visit <https://bit.ly/46IOMYz>.