

When it comes to maternity care access in the United States (US), where you live matters when it comes to the options available for maternity care. According to the March of Dimes (MOD), more than 5.6 million women of childbearing age in the US live in counties with limited or no access to maternity care. In their 2024 report, *Nowhere to Go: Maternity Care Deserts Across the US* more than 35% of counties in the country are considered maternity care deserts. This means that in 1,104 US counties, there is not a single birthing facility or obstetric clinician. These counties are home to over 2.3 million women of reproductive age and are the resident counties of women who gave birth to over 150,000 babies in 2022. MOD has classified Meigs, Ohio; Gallia, Ohio; Mason, West Virginia with levels of maternity care that equate to “low access to care”.

Women living in maternity care deserts and counties with low access to care have poorer health before pregnancy, receive less prenatal care, and experience higher rates of preterm birth. In 2020-2022, more than 10,000 preterm births occurred among those living in maternity care deserts and limited-access counties within the US.

Expanding and extending Medicaid coverage has helped, but there continues to be steady reports of obstetric unit closures and workforce shortages. In fact, 1 in every 25 obstetric units in the US shuttered their doors in the last 2 years, resulting in fewer choices, increased stress, and greater travel times for birthing women. More than 1 in 3 US counties lack a single obstetric clinician, and in many parts of the country obstetricians-gynecologists (OB-GYNs) and family physicians who deliver babies are leaving the workforce.

Improved access and increased options for care are possible. The Meigs County Health Department (MCHD) proudly announces its collaboration with OhioHealth to bring the Wellness on Wheels (WOW) Program into the County for weekly visits offering primary and women’s healthcare services. WOW works just like a normal doctor’s office. A team of professionals will work one-on-one with patients to provide prenatal services (such as ultrasounds and lab work); confidential social services counseling, resources and referrals; health insurance and prescription assistance; transportation assistance; interpreter services; reproductive counseling and birth control. The WOW mobile unit is parked weekly, on Tuesdays, at the MCHD, which is located at 112 E. Memorial Drive in Pomeroy, OH.

WOW is uniquely positioned through purpose-driven partnerships to serve underinsured and uninsured members in underserved communities. Their commitment extends to everyone, regardless of immigration status or ability to pay. By fostering strong relationships within the community, WOW ensures that all individuals have access to the healthcare they need and deserve.

WOW and the Meigs County Health Department (MCHD) will be there for families at every stage of the pregnancy journey, even when access to high-quality care is out of reach. WOW's mobile unit will offer on-the-ground maternal health programs with services aimed at bringing support, education, and care to moms and moms-to-be.

Additionally, convenient access to local services such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, vaccines recommended for expectant and new mothers and their family members, the Cribs for Kids Program (offering safe sleep surfaces for infants in eligible families), kiosk access for services offered through Ohio's Help Me Grow Program, and referrals to other available community resources will be available inside the MCHD.

To schedule an appointment for WOW services, please call 740-331-7373. For more information about services available via the MCHD, call 740-992-6626 Monday – Friday from 8AM-4PM or visit www.meigs-health.com.

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