Update: The Expanding Maternity Care Desert in Pennsylvania

January 2026

Introduction

Together eight contiguous counties in North Central Pennsylvania, Cameron, Clarion, Clinton, Elk, Forest, McKean, Potter, and Warren, are home to around 35,000 women of childbearing age (15 to 44 years old), but these women lack local labor and delivery services. This northern maternity care desert has expanded since May 2025, when the Center for Rural Pennsylvania reported a maternity desert spanning seven contiguous counties in its publication, *Access to Maternity Care in Pennsylvania: Labor and Delivery Services*. These counties comprise some 6,000 square miles, an area that is greater than the size of Connecticut.

In the last eight months, one rural hospital has discontinued labor and delivery services, and one urban hospital providing these services has closed entirely. These closures reflect broader shifts in healthcare availability across the Commonwealth and have contributed to the expansion of geographic gaps in access, particularly in rural areas.

23 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties do not have a hospital that provides labor and delivery services, according to Pennsylvania Department of Health data and other publicly available sources. All 23 counties are classified as rural by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Over the past decade, changes in healthcare availability, including hospital closures and service reductions, have contributed to a decline in maternity care services, particularly labor and delivery units, across rural counties. Furthermore, the closest hospital with a labor and delivery unit for 5 counties (Bedford, McKean, Pike, Potter, and Warren) is in New York state, highlighting the lack of in-state options.

The closure or consolidation of labor and delivery services has increased travel distances for expectant mothers, effectively creating barriers to maternity care in many rural communities. Timely access to labor and delivery services is a critical factor in supporting maternal and infant health outcomes. This updated fact sheet provides an overview of current access to maternity care, specifically labor and delivery services, in rural Pennsylvania.

Key Findings

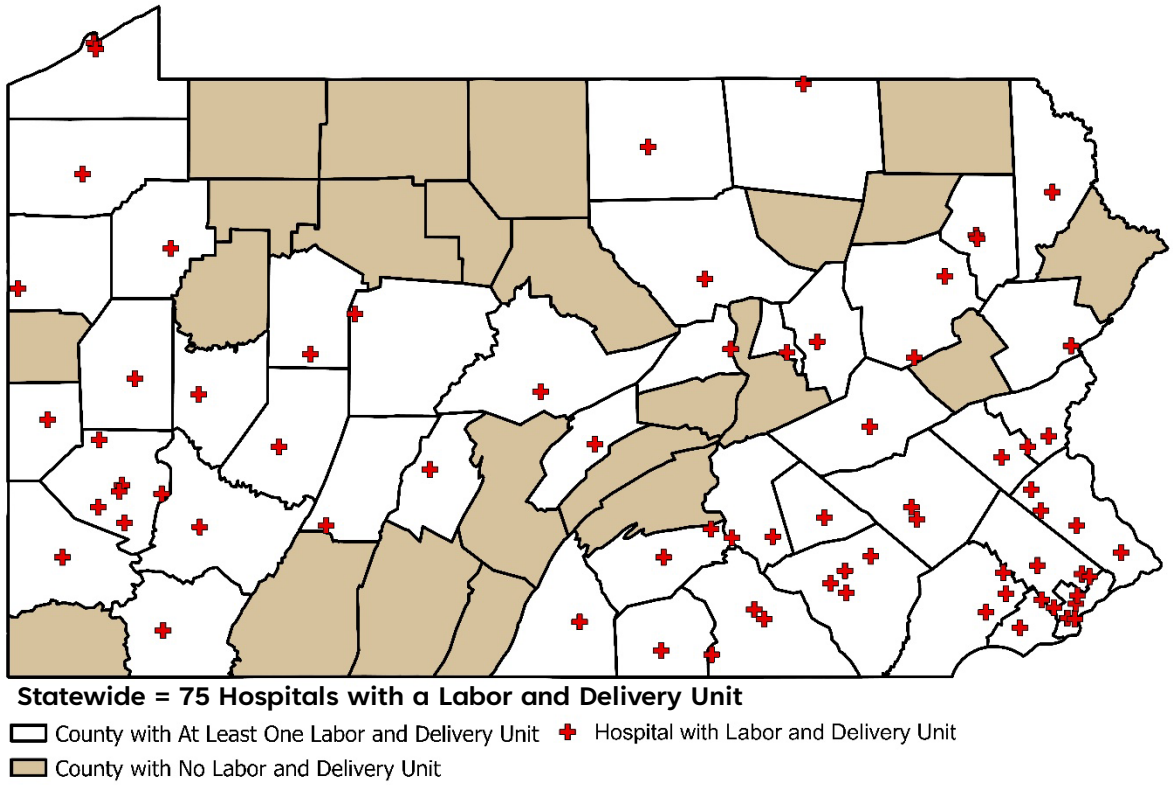
- Since May 2025, one rural hospital has discontinued labor and delivery services, and one urban hospital with labor and delivery services has closed completely.
- Seventy-five hospitals across Pennsylvania provide labor and delivery services; only 25 (33 percent) of these hospitals are located in rural counties.
- Twenty-three of Pennsylvania's 67 counties do not have a hospital offering labor and delivery services; all 23 are rural counties. Overall, this affects nearly half (48 percent) of all rural counties.

- In counties without a hospital offering labor and delivery services, the average distance from the county seat to the nearest hospital providing these services is 27 miles, with the furthest distance reaching 52 miles.
- Approximately 3.5 million Pennsylvanians (27 percent) live outside of a 20-minute drive to a hospital offering labor and delivery services.

Current Landscape of Labor and Delivery Services in Pennsylvania

As of January 2026, 75 hospitals in Pennsylvania provide labor and delivery services, with 25 located in rural counties. However, 59 percent of Pennsylvania's rural general acute care hospitals (n=61) operate without a dedicated labor and delivery unit. As shown in Figure 1, 23 rural counties across the state lack a hospital with labor and delivery services.

Figure 1: Locations of Hospitals with a Labor and Delivery Unit, 2026



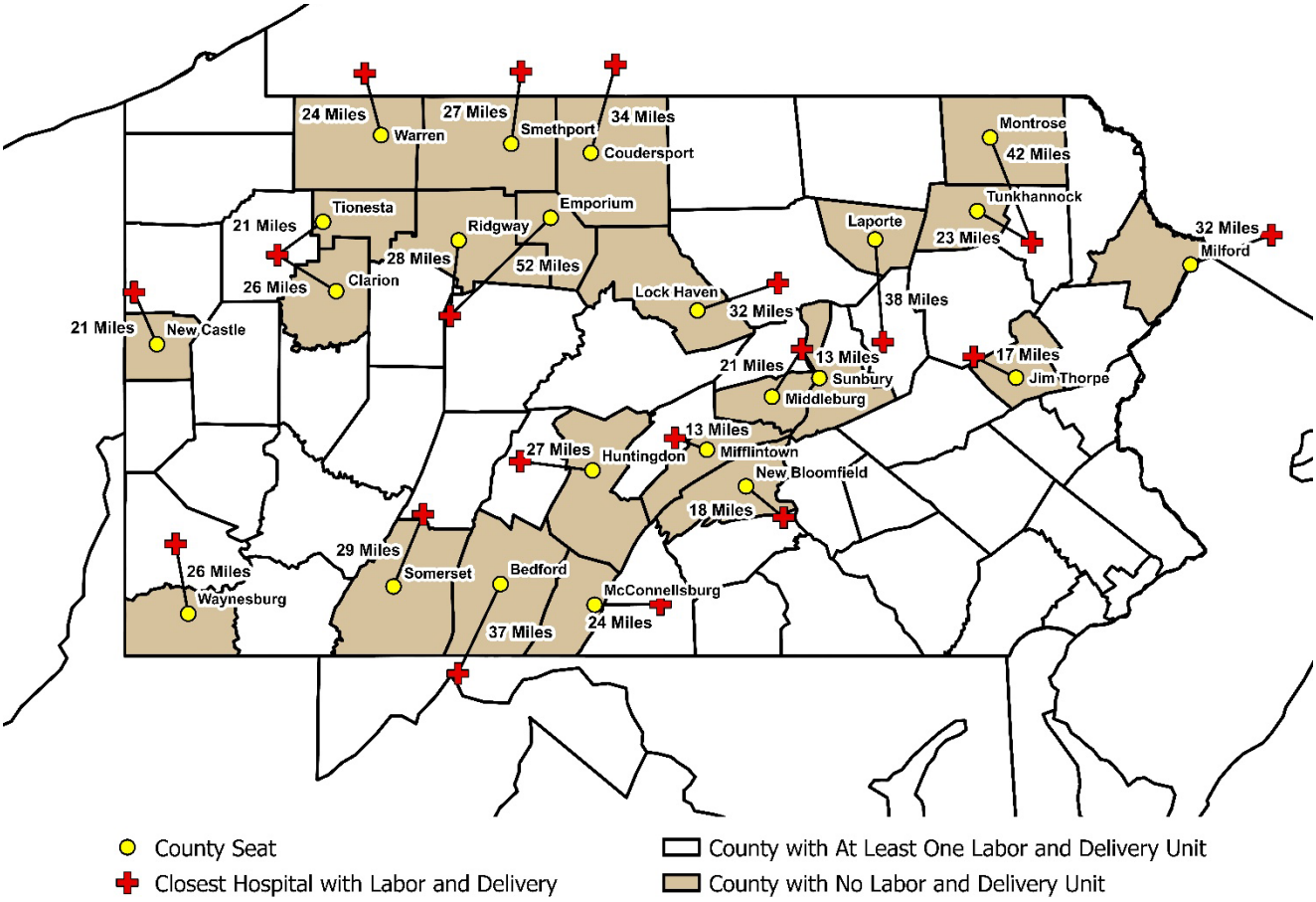
Data Source: 2024 Hospital Reports, Health Facilities—Pennsylvania Department of Health, and additional public sources (e.g., hospital websites, news articles, media accounts). See the Methodology section for more information.

Implications of Limited Access

Residents of counties without labor and delivery services must travel an average of 27 miles from the county seat to the nearest hospital providing these services. In some cases, the distance is significantly greater. For example, as shown in Figure 2, residents

of Emporium in Cameron County have the longest planar (straight-line, flat map) travel distance (52 miles) to reach the nearest hospital with labor and delivery services. In five counties (Bedford, McKean, Pike, Potter, and Warren), the nearest hospital with labor and delivery services is located outside of Pennsylvania, highlighting the geographic challenges faced by rural residents in accessing in-state care.

Figure 2: Nearest Hospitals with a Labor and Delivery Unit for Counties in Pennsylvania Without Labor and Delivery Services, 2026

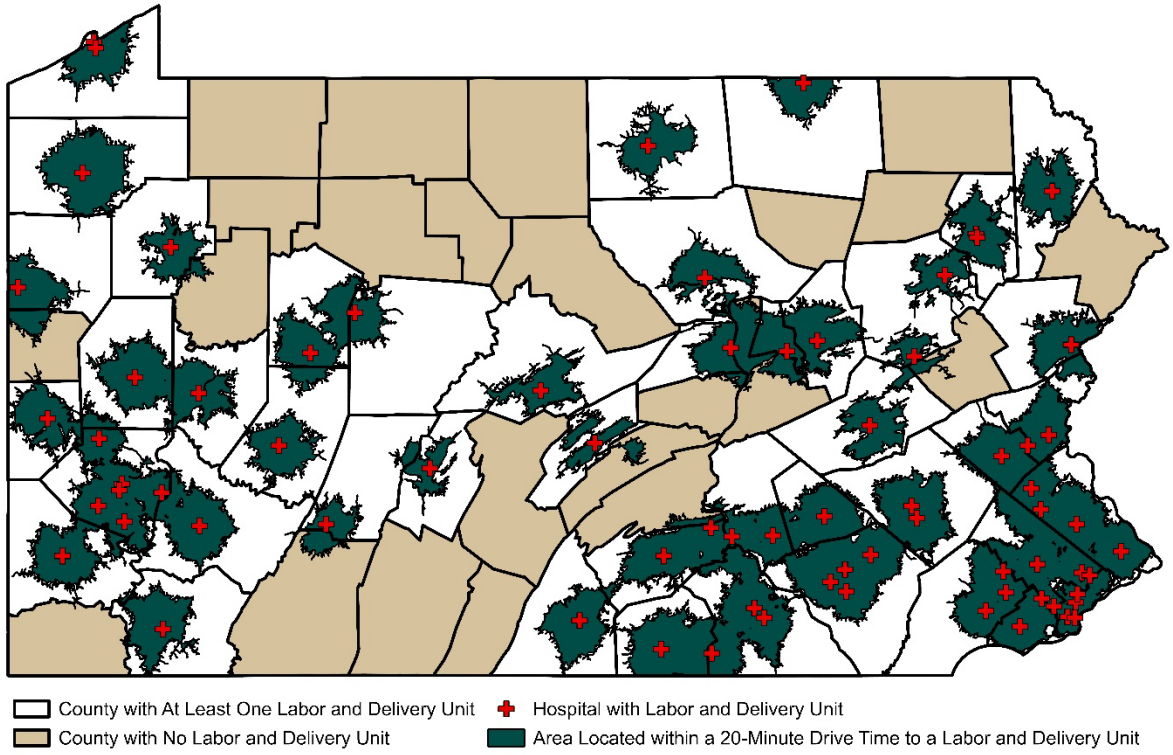


Note: The distance between the county seat and the nearest hospital is an estimated straight-line planar distance. It does not account for road networks or terrain.
Data Sources: 2024 Hospital Reports, Health Facilities - Pennsylvania Department of Health, Maryland Department of Health, West Virginia Hospital Association, Ohio Hospital Association, New York Department of Health, and additional public sources (e.g., hospital websites, news articles, media accounts). See the Methodology section for more information.

Even in counties where a hospital offers labor and delivery care, many residents still face substantial travel times, as seen in Figure 3. Statewide, approximately 3.5 million Pennsylvanians live more than 20 minutes from the nearest hospital providing labor and delivery services.

Increased travel time is associated with a higher risk of maternal and neonatal complications and can result in a greater incidence of births occurring outside of hospital settings. The closure of labor and delivery services also strains local healthcare systems, particularly emergency services, and impacts the availability of prenatal and postnatal care. These closures may further affect the overall public health of women and babies in rural communities. Additionally, the lack of labor and delivery services may exacerbate population decline in rural communities, as potentially new rural residents may be discouraged by the limited availability of services.

Figure 3: 20-Minute Drive Time to a Hospital with a Labor and Delivery Unit, 2026



Note: Population is based on the 2020 Census.
Data Source: 2024 Hospital Reports, Health Facilities - Pennsylvania Department of Health, U.S. Census Bureau, and additional public sources (e.g., hospital websites, news articles, media accounts). See the Methodology section for more information.

Conclusion

Access to hospital-based labor and delivery services in rural Pennsylvania has declined over the past decade, affecting both geographic access and the availability of maternity care providers. Longer travel distances, reduced availability of obstetricians and gynecologists, and limited prenatal and postnatal care resources present ongoing challenges for rural communities. As the birth rate continues to decline in Pennsylvania, this may further decrease the availability and sustainability of maternity care services. Continued monitoring of labor and delivery service access is essential to understanding the health equity landscape and its potential impacts on maternal and infant health outcomes across the Commonwealth. As the Pennsylvania Rural Health Transformation

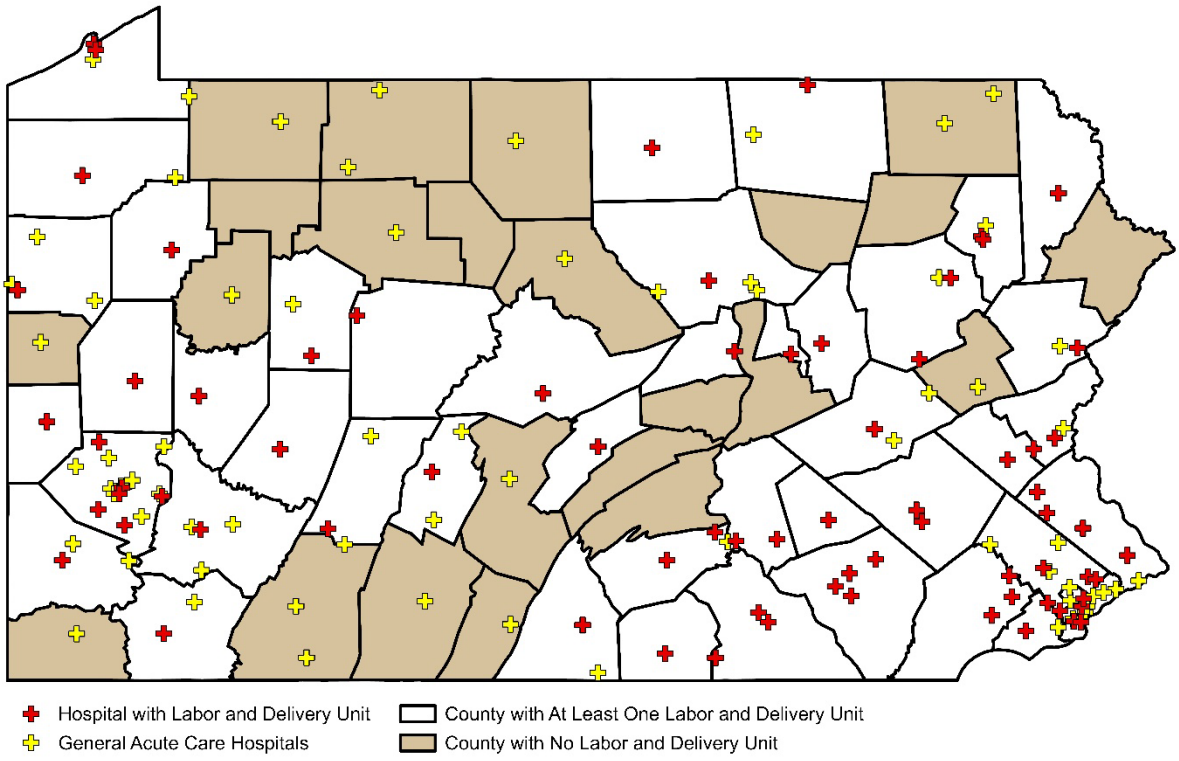
Plan is implemented, relevant state departments should closely monitor changes in maternity care access and service availability to inform ongoing rural health initiatives.

Appendix:

Table 1: List of Nearest Hospitals with a Labor and Delivery Unit for Counties in Pennsylvania Without Labor and Delivery Services, 2026

County	County Seat	Est. Distance to Closest Hospital with L&D (in Miles)	Closest Hospital with L&D	Location of Hospital
Bedford	Bedford	37	UPMC Western Maryland	Cumberland, MD
Cameron	Emporium	52	Penn Highlands DuBois	DuBois
Carbon	Jim Thorpe	17	Lehigh Valley Hospital Hazleton	Hazleton
Clarion	Clarion	26	UPMC Northwest	Seneca
Clinton	Lock Haven	32	UPMC Williamsport	Williamsport
Elk	Ridgway	28	Penn Highlands DuBois	DuBois
Forest	Tionesta	21	UPMC Northwest	Seneca
Fulton	McConnellsburg	24	The Chambersburg Hospital - WellSpan Chambersburg Hospital	Chambersburg
Greene	Waynesburg	26	Washington Hospital	Washington
Huntingdon	Huntingdon	27	UPMC Altoona	Altoona
Juniata	Mifflintown	13	Geisinger Lewistown Hospital	Lewistown
Lawrence	New Castle	21	UPMC Horizon – Shenango Valley	Farrell
McKean	Smethport	27	Olean General Hospital	Olean, NY
Northumberland	Sunbury	13	Evangelical Community Hospital	Lewisburg
Perry	New Bloomfield	18	Penn State Health Hampden Medical Center	Enola
Pike	Milford	32	Garnet Health Medical Center	Middletown, NY
Potter	Coudersport	34	Jones Memorial Hospital	Wellsville, NY
Snyder	Middleburg	21	Evangelical Community Hospital	Lewisburg
Somerset	Somerset	29	Conemaugh Memorial Medical Center	Johnstown
Sullivan	Laporte	38	Geisinger Bloomsburg Hospital	Bloomsburg
Susquehanna	Montrose	42	Regional Hospital of Scranton	Scranton
Warren	Warren	24	UPMC Chautauqua	Jamestown, NY
Wyoming	Tunkhannock	23	Regional Hospital of Scranton	Scranton

Figure 4: Location of General Acute Care Hospitals and Hospitals with a Labor and Delivery Unit, 2026



Data Source: 2024 Hospital Reports, Health Facilities – Pennsylvania Department of Health, and additional public sources (e.g., hospital websites, news articles, media accounts). See the Methodology section for more information.

Definitions:

Rural and Urban: A county is rural when the number of people per square mile within the county or school district is fewer than 291. Counties that have 291 people or more per square mile are considered urban.

Methodology for Nearest Hospitals with a Labor and Delivery Unit for Counties in Pennsylvania Without Labor and Delivery Services:

Data Sources:

- 2024 Hospital Report, Health Facilities - Pennsylvania Department of Health.
    - Only accounted for hospitals that reported "Yes" for "Labor and Delivery Unit."
- Public Sources (e.g., hospital websites, news articles, public media accounts).
    - Additional hospitals were added or removed based on verification from other publicly available sources, such as news reports and hospital websites.
    - Note: This represents our best effort to compile accurate and current information. Some discrepancies may remain, particularly regarding hospital branch campuses.

Process/Assumptions:

- ArcGIS Pro was used to calculate planar (flat map) distances from the centroid of each county seat (for counties without a Labor and Delivery Unit) to the nearest hospital offering labor and delivery services.
- Distances are presented in U.S. Survey Miles.
- The geographic coordinate system used is World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 1984), and the projected coordinate system is World Mercator.
- This is a straight-line (planar) analysis that does not account for the Earth's curvature or topography; therefore, the distances displayed may be slightly longer than those calculated using a geodesic (curved surface) method. In contrast, geodesic distances account for the Earth's curvature and represent the shortest path between two points on a curved surface, which can yield slightly shorter distances, especially over long ranges. However, regardless of the method used, this approach allows for meaningful comparisons between locations. Note: The planar (straight-line) distance is a better representation of actual drive miles for these locations.

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