

MAT-SU REGION

REGION OVERVIEW

Matanuska Susitna (Mat Su) Borough is located 35 miles north of Anchorage and spans 25,000 square miles across the Matanuska and Susitna River Valleys. The region includes the cities of Palmer, Wasilla, and Houston, as well as numerous smaller communities. With a population of 115,239, Mat-Su is the fastest growing region of Alaska. The region is known for its fertile farmland and is Alaska's major agricultural region.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Mat-Su region is shaped by its pioneer spirit, rural lifestyle, and strong sense of community. The region is home to Dena'ina Athabascan communities. With a mix of longtime Alaskan families, newcomers seeking a quieter life, and Alaska Native communities, Mat-Su blends tradition and modernity in a way that reflects its rapid growth while maintaining deep-rooted local values. Many residents embrace a self-reliant, independent way of life, often engaging in subsistence activities like hunting, fishing, and farming. The area is known for its agricultural heritage which brought Midwestern settlers to develop farming in the valley.

*All data
2019-2023 unless
otherwise noted.*

MATERNAL HEALTH DATA SUMMARY

The Mat-Su region has some of the best birth outcomes in Alaska, including high access to prenatal care, low preterm birth rates, low infant mortality, low cesarean births, and low cigarette use during pregnancy. The region has strong prenatal care access and utilization with 74.9 % of births receiving adequate or better

prenatal care. Mat Su has the highest percentage of out-of-hospital births in the state—twice the statewide rate and almost eight times the national average.

	Mat-Su	Statewide
General fertility rate	66.1	65.0
Teen birth rate	11.1	16.3
Preterm births	8.8%	10.0%
Low birth weight infants	5.7%	6.7%
Prenatal care in first trimester	75.0%	73.3%
Adequate or better prenatal care	74.9%	66.6%
Cesarean births among low-risk pregnancies	22.7%	18.5%
Cesarean births	25.7%	23.1%
Cigarette smoking during pregnancy	8.4%	9.3%
Infant mortality rate (2014-2023)	4.1	6.4
Crude Birth Rate	12.4	13.2
Average annual births	1,362	8,758
Medicaid Births (average annual)	764	5,128
% of births to Medicaid	56%	54%

74.9%

Adequate or better
prenatal care

SYSTEM OF CARE

The Mat-Su maternity care system includes hospital-based care, private practice providers, birth centers, and midwifery services, offering local options for routine prenatal care and low-risk deliveries. Out-of-hospital providers offer water births, home and birth centers, and postpartum services but require hospital transfers for cesarean or high-risk births. Strong collaboration between community providers and the hospital is essential for seamless transfers. Patients needing maternal-fetal medicine or a higher-level NICU often travel to Anchorage for specialized care.

Telehealth is widely used for provider-to-provider consultations, particularly for specialist referrals and behavioral health support.

Behavioral health provider shortages and long wait times create barriers to timely care. Many expectant and postpartum mothers struggle to receive consistent mental health support. Telehealth services have become an essential tool, allowing provider-to-provider consultations and direct patient counseling sessions, which help expand access to mental health care. Family medicine providers often serve as the first point of contact for individuals experiencing emotional or psychological concerns and are uniquely positioned to recognize and address mental health issues alongside physical health.

Births in Mat-Su Region Hospitals/Birth Centers

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5 year total	5 year average	% of statewide births	% change over 5 years
Mat-Su Regional Medical Center	748	672	763	763	750	3,696	739		0.27%
Mat-Su Midwifery, Wasilla	66	64	57	93	82	362	72		24.24%
Labor Of Love Midwifery, Wasilla	37	49	37	28	**	151+	31		
New Life Midwifery & Birth Center, Palmer	11	**	12	**	19	42+	12		72.73%
Integrated Women's Wellness & Center For Birth, Wasilla	39	29	**	**	**	68+	23		
Total Births in Mat Su Hospitals/Birth Centers*	901	814	869	884	851	4,319	877	9%	-5.55%
Total Births to Region Residents	1,369	1,341	1,345	1,415	1,338	6,808	1,362	14%	Stable

* Does not include home births ** Under 10 births

STRENGTHS

OUTCOMES: The Mat-Su region has some of the best birth outcomes in Alaska, including high access to prenatal care, low preterm birth rates, low infant mortality, low cesarean births, and low cigarette use during pregnancy.

FAMILY MEDICINE providers offer comprehensive prenatal, delivery, and postpartum care. By integrating maternity services into their family medicine practices, these providers ensure accessible and continuous maternal healthcare. Their long-term relationships with patients may contribute to the region's lower teen birth rate and higher rates of adequate or better prenatal care.

CHOICES: The combination of excellent birth outcomes and high rates of out-of-hospital community births highlights the value of offering choices and supporting midwives for low-risk deliveries.

COLLABORATION between community birthing providers and hospitals is improving, leading to smoother transfers when higher levels of care are needed.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

Mat-Su Regional Medical Center (MSRMC), Palmer: Mat-Su Regional Medical Center (MSRMC) is the only hospital in the region, operating under a public-private partnership between Community Health Systems, a national healthcare company, and the Mat-Su Health Foundation, a local nonprofit organization. The hospital has 125 licensed beds, including a 10-bed Family Birthing Center, which provides comprehensive maternity care encompassing prenatal care, labor and delivery, and postpartum support. A team of OB/GYNs, family medicine physicians, and certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) work collaboratively to provide well-rounded maternal healthcare and ensure that patients receive personalized and evidence-based care.

MSRMC has two full-time lactation nurses, supported by several floor nurses who are certified lactation consultants. These specialists provide inpatient lactation consultations and offer one free consultation after discharge, ensuring that new mothers receive ongoing breastfeeding support as they transition home.

BIRTH CENTERS:

Mat-Su Midwifery and Family Health (Wasilla): Offers prenatal care, labor and delivery support, and postpartum care, with an emphasis on holistic, individualized care.

“Hello B.A.B.Y.” launches comprehensive support program

MAT-SU REGIONAL Medical Center is collaborating with community agencies to launch the Hello B.A.B.Y. (Building Alaska’s Babies with You) program, which will offer comprehensive support for new and expecting parents, promoting infant health, family well-being, and early childhood development. The program aims to ensure that all families receive the support they need for a strong start in their parenting journey.

CHALLENGES

RECRUITING AND RETAINING skilled maternity care providers, including OBGYNs, family physicians with OB training, and midwives, remains a challenge.

TRANSPORTATION barriers limit access to prenatal care and specialized maternity services, particularly for rural residents who must travel to Anchorage. Medicaid-approved transportation options are insufficient.

ACCESS TO PERINATAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH services is limited, making it difficult for families to receive timely mental health support.

COORDINATION between hospital and private practice providers, birth centers, tribal health system and midwives can be difficult, particularly during emergency transfers. Building strong relationships between established providers and care facilities is essential to improving collaboration.

NEWBORNS NEEDING SPECIALIZED CARE are transferred to Anchorage hospitals, creating emotional and logistical strain on families and increasing demand on limited neonatal beds in tertiary care centers.

RECOMMENDATIONS / OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

ESTABLISHING A LEVEL 2 NICU at Mat-Su Regional Medical Center would enhance local maternal and neonatal care by allowing moderately premature infants and those needing short-term respiratory support to remain in the community. This would reduce transfers to Anchorage, keep families together, ease demand on neonatal beds in tertiary centers, and strengthen regional healthcare access—positioning Mat-Su Regional as a more comprehensive maternity care facility.

CONTINUE TO DEVELOP community partnerships for labor and delivery services. Partnerships could provide culturally responsive maternity care in Mat-Su and reduce the need for travel to Anchorage. Improving access to coordinated and community-based maternity care would enhance maternal and infant health outcomes by ensuring families receive comprehensive, locally available care.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

BIRTH CENTERS:

Heirloom Wellness and Birth (Palmer):

Provides midwifery care, functional medicine, and family health services in a comfortable birth center setting.

Haven Midwifery and Birth Center: Offers prenatal care, flexible birthing options, and attentive postpartum support in a nurturing environment.

HOME BIRTHS

Supported by certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) or certified direct-entry midwives (CDMs):

New Life Midwifery and Birth Center

Traditional Roots Midwifery

PERINATAL PROVIDERS

Private family medicine providers in the region have delivery privileges at Mat-Su Regional Medical Center and offer comprehensive prenatal, delivery, and postpartum care. The following are the key practices:

Bruck Clift Family Medicine (Palmer) provides comprehensive maternity care services. The practice emphasizes continuity of care, ensuring that patients consistently see their provider throughout their maternity journey.

Wild Iris Family Medicine (Wasilla) serves families under the leadership of a family medicine physician. The clinic offers comprehensive obstetrical care, including vaginal birth after cesarean (VBACs) and

cesarean sections. Wild Iris emphasizes preventive care and education.

Capstone Family Medicine (Wasilla) offers comprehensive maternity care services. The clinic's services include prenatal, obstetric care, and postpartum support, emphasizing a patient-centered approach.

Alpenglow Women's Health (Wasilla):

Provides comprehensive pregnancy care, from prenatal visits to delivery and postpartum follow-up. The practice utilizes a collaborative model, combining the expertise of OB/GYNs and certified nurse-midwives.

Mat-Su Women's Health Specialists

(Palmer): Offers gynecological and obstetric services, including prenatal care and delivery support.

Benteh Nuutah Valley Native Primary Care Center (Wasilla) operated by Southcentral Foundation offers a range of health services to Alaska Native and American Indian people in the region. Prenatal and post-natal care is managed by midwives and patients are referred to ANMC for delivery. Benteh Nuutah offers integrated behavioral health services, providing psychiatric evaluations, medication management, psychotherapy, and crisis intervention to support the mental well-being of pregnant and postpartum people.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

There are several options for accessing maternal behavioral health in the Mat-Su Borough. **Mat-Su Mental Health, LLC**

specifically offers comprehensive support for birthing people provided by their dedicated team of maternal mental health counselors. There are several other behavioral health organizations in the valley including **Mat-Su Health Services** and **Alaska Behavioral Health**. Additionally, there are two local certified Perinatal Mental Health Professionals listed in the Postpartum Support International (PSI)'s provider directory at [postpartum.net](https://www.postpartum.net).

“At Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, one of our greatest strengths is the partnership between our nursing staff and OB providers—built on strong communication, mutual respect, and trust. Additionally, the dedication of our nurses shines through in their professional certifications, ensuring exceptional, high-quality care for our patients.”

— Adrian Stauffer,
Mat-Su Regional Medical Center,
Family Birthing Center Director