

OTHER INTERIOR REGION

REGION OVERVIEW

The Other Interior region includes a wide swath of interior Alaska surrounding Fairbanks including Glennallen, Copper Center, Fort Yukon, and Galena and extends all the way to the coast to include Cordova, Whitter, and Valdez on Prince William Sound. The region covers a vast area of 217,256 square miles and has a total population of 23,489.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Interior region is home to the Athabascan, Eyak, and Alutiiq peoples. Fishing, hunting, and gathering continue to be essential for many people reinforcing strong connections to the land and water. Residents live in small, isolated communities, fostering a strong sense of self-reliance, community cooperation, and adaptability to extreme conditions.

MATERNAL HEALTH DATA SUMMARY

Other Interior is a geographic region and does not represent a system of care region – it covers communities spread across a vast land mass with few maternity services. With only one hospital offering labor and delivery services and specialized maternity care, 90% of births occur in Fairbanks, Anchorage, or wherever Interior residents have family connections. Prenatal care is provided at small clinics.

Birth rates are similar to the statewide rates, but the region has a lower infant mortality rate (3.6%) than the state (6.4%). Access to prenatal care is a concern, both in terms of pregnant people receiving first-trimester prenatal care, and also receiving adequate prenatal care throughout their pregnancy. The region also has higher Medicaid birth coverage than statewide.

	Other Interior	Statewide
General fertility rate	71.7	65.0
Teen birth rate	16.1	16.3
Preterm births	8.3%	10.0%
Low birth weight infants	5.3%	6.7%
Prenatal care in first trimester	63.4%	73.3%
Adequate or better prenatal care	50.7%	66.6%
Cesarean births among low-risk pregnancies	17.6%	18.5%
Cesarean births	21.5%	23.1%
Cigarette smoking during pregnancy	10.7%	9.3%
Infant mortality rate (2014-2023)	3.6	6.4
Crude Birth Rate	12.2	13.2
Average annual births	286	8,758
Medicaid Births (average annual)	181	5,128
% of births to Medicaid	63%	59%

90%
births occur
outside region

All data
2019-2023 unless
otherwise noted.

SYSTEM OF CARE

Maternity care in the Interior region of Alaska is provided through local health centers and support organizations, with only one hospital in the region offering labor and delivery services. Most women must travel to receive obstetric services in Anchorage, Palmer, or Fairbanks. Tribal OB/GYNs conduct limited field clinics, but they often focus on GYN care rather than full prenatal and obstetric services. The lack of local care can result in delays in access along with the challenges of traveling for medical visits.

Some of the communities are on the road system, but travel distances are great especially during the winter months when snow and ice can delay or limit safe travel. Other communities are accessible by small planes and only one is served by commercial jet service.

Births in Other Interior Region Hospitals/Birth Centers

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5 year total	5 year average	% of statewide births	% change over 5 years
Providence Valdez Medical Center	31	27	29	17	18	122	24		-41.94%
Total Births in Interior Hospitals/Birth Centers	31	27	29	17	18	122	24	0.3%	
Total Births to Region Residents	305	285	293	276	272	1,431	286	3%	
# Births leaving region	274	258	264	259	254	1,309	262		
% of births leaving region	90%	91%	90%	94%	93%	91%	91%		

STRENGTHS

RESIDENTS of remote communities are resourceful and resilient, relying on strong support networks within their communities.

VALDEZ HAS MAINTAINED LABOR AND DELIVERY services despite challenges, thanks to the dedication of the hospital, nurses, and physicians in meeting community needs.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE throughout the region due to the creativity and commitment of providers and local communities.

CHALLENGES

MOST PREGNANT PEOPLE MUST TRAVEL LONG DISTANCES for delivery due to limited birthing centers. Remote locations often require air travel, and weather conditions can delay medevac flights. The cost of travel for routine and high-risk prenatal care creates financial, emotional, and logistical burdens.

PROVIDENCE VALDEZ FACES CHALLENGES in maintaining staff competencies due to low delivery volumes. Recruiting and retaining family medicine providers with obstetric skills is

difficult, and training opportunities are limited. As part of the Providence health system, staff have access to simulation training and periodic rotations in higher-volume hospitals, but these require funding and logistical support.

MANY RURAL COMMUNITIES rely on family medicine physicians with obstetric training rather than dedicated OB/GYN specialists. Recruiting and retaining these providers is difficult due to isolation, competition with larger hospitals, and limited resources.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

Providence Valdez Medical Center is a critical access hospital with 11 acute-care beds and 10 long-term care beds. The medical center offers comprehensive maternity services, including prenatal care, labor and delivery, and postpartum care. The hospital handles an average of 24 low-risk deliveries per year and provides a full range of supporting healthcare services, such as laboratory testing, radiology, and therapy services.

Cordova Community Medical Center is a 13-bed critical access hospital owned and operated by the city of Cordova. The hospital offers a primary care clinic that provides routine health assessments and treatment and prenatal and postpartum care along with 24/7 emergency services. The hospital discontinued labor and delivery due to the challenges of maintaining services in a low volume environment, but staff are available for pregnancy-related emergencies. Women are referred to Anchorage or go to a location close to family or friends 2-4 weeks prior to due date.

BIRTH CENTERS AND HOME BIRTHS

There are no birth centers in the Interior region of Alaska and home births are uncommon in the region.

PERINATAL CARE PROVIDERS

Valdez has two family medicine providers who manage prenatal care, deliveries, and postpartum support. Their broad medical training allows them to oversee both maternal and newborn health, ensuring continuity of care within the community.

Cordova has family medicine providers who handle all routine prenatal and postnatal appointments. However, people are referred to Anchorage at 36 weeks gestation for labor and delivery.

Tribal health organizations support Alaska Native people to receive care at clinics and regional hubs.

Glennallen offers essential prenatal and general healthcare services through local centers like Copper River Native Association and Crossroads Medical Center, but birthing people need to plan for delivery at medical facilities in Palmer or Anchorage. Local organizations provide support and resources to assist families throughout the prenatal and postnatal periods.

McGrath provides prenatal care through nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

There are limited behavioral health services in the region. Hospitals and clinics offer on-site and itinerant behavioral services. Additional behavioral health services are available via telehealth.

CHALLENGES

CORDOVA LACKS an in-house sonographer; instead, a visiting sonographer provides services only once a month, making timely ultrasounds difficult. Patients requiring Level 2 ultrasounds must travel to Anchorage.

LIMITED POSTPARTUM CARE and lactation support increase the risk of complications. Many communities lack dedicated resources for breastfeeding education, newborn care, and maternal recovery.

RECOMMENDATIONS / OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

IDENTIFY RESOURCES AND SUPPORT needed to maintain labor and delivery services at the one remaining birthing hospital in the region.

EXPAND TELEHEALTH SERVICES for prenatal and postpartum care to reduce the need to travel long distances.

BUILD ON EXISTING COMMUNITY SUPPORT systems through trained community health worker or doula programs for prenatal and postpartum support including home visits.

The Mom2Mom Program by Copper River Native Association provides an online community designed for mothers and caregivers of children aged 0-8, offering support and discussions on various parenting topics. Meetings are held virtually on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month.