



FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR REGION

REGION OVERVIEW

The Fairbanks North Star Borough region is located 350 miles north of Anchorage in the interior of Alaska and covers 7,444 square miles. The borough, which includes Fairbanks, North Pole, and numerous small communities, has a population of 94,840 and is the third largest region in Alaska. The region is home to Fort Wainwright (Army), Eielson Air Force Base and the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Fairbanks North Star Borough is a diverse region shaped by its Indigenous heritage, military presence, university influence, and remote Alaskan lifestyle. Fairbanks is located on the traditional land of the Tanana Athabascans whose cultural traditions continue to shape the region. Many residents have a resilient spirit and self-reliant lifestyle of hunting, fishing, off-grid-living, and adapting to extreme weather conditions.

MATERNAL HEALTH DATA SUMMARY

The Fairbanks region has excellent birth outcomes with a crude birth rate that has seen a 10% decrease over five years although is still slightly higher than the statewide rate; its teen birth rate and preterm birth rate are lower than statewide rates. Adequate or better prenatal care is slightly higher in Fairbanks (68.4%) than the state (66.6%).

Fairbanks Memorial Hospital and Bassett Army Hospital are the only facilities providing

deliveries and only 5.5% of births occur in a community setting—due to the closure of the freestanding birth center in 2023, this is likely to decrease in future years.

Fairbanks remains an important regional birthing hub with an estimated 10% of births coming from outside the region. Likely due to the large numbers of births to military families with insurance coverage, Fairbanks has the lowest percentage of Medicaid births (34%) in the State.

	Fairbanks	Statewide
General fertility rate	69.4	65.0
Teen birth rate	15.3	16.3
Preterm births	8.9%	10.0%
Low birth weight infants	6.6%	6.7%
Prenatal care in first trimester	73.3%	73.3%
Adequate or better prenatal care	68.4%	66.6%
Cesarean births among low-risk pregnancies	16.4%	18.5%
Cesarean births	23.2%	23.1%
Cigarette smoking during pregnancy	5.6%	9.3%
Infant mortality rate (2014-2023)	5.7	6.4
Crude Birth Rate	14.3	13.2
Average annual births	1,376	8,758
Medicaid Births (average annual)	473	5,128
% of births to Medicaid	34%	54%

34%

lowest percentage of Medicaid births (34%) in the State

All data
2019-2023 unless
otherwise noted.

SYSTEM OF CARE

Fairbanks' compact geography allows most residents to access medical care within 30 minutes, supporting accessible maternity services. As a healthcare hub for the Interior, Fairbanks draws patients from remote communities, who receive basic care locally but must travel in for labor and delivery. Tribal members receive coordinated care through Tanana Chiefs Conference, which also provides housing; however, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital does not offer prematernal housing. Medicaid covers lodging and meals for eligible patients.

Local providers manage most maternity care with support from Anchorage specialists via provider consultations. All perinatal providers screen for mood and substance use disorders, though screening tools and processes vary by practice. Providers agree that standardized tools and integration into shared medical records would improve care. Access to psychiatrists and Medicaid-accepting behavioral health providers is limited, but Medication-Assisted Treatment is available, with priority given to pregnant women.

Births in Fairbanks North Star Region Hospitals/Birth Centers

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5 year total	5 year average	% of statewide births	% change over 5 years
Fairbanks Memorial Hospital	982	989	1,092	1,038	1,000	5,101	1,020		1.83%
Bassett Army Hospital	465	443	453	433	339	2,133	427		-27.10%
[CLOSED IN 2023] Alaska Family Health and Birth Center	58	40	40	34	14	186	37		
Total Births	1,505	1,472	1,585	1,505	1,353	7,420	1,484	16%	
Total Births to Region Residents	1,382	1,333	1,485	1,397	1,283	6,880	1,376	15%	Stable
# Births coming to region	123	139	100	108	70	540	108		

STRENGTHS

COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL CARE: Fairbanks serves as a maternity care hub for Interior Alaska, meeting most local maternity and pediatric needs without requiring transfers.

PROVIDER COLLABORATION & TRAINING: The healthcare community actively coordinates training efforts, including monthly OB drills and simulation training led by a certified nurse midwife (CNM) at Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center.

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER SUPPORT: Access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for substance use disorders is available at Tanana Valley Clinic, where providers collaborate to ensure comprehensive care.

INTEGRATED HOME BIRTH & HOSPITAL CARE: Strong coordination exists between home birth midwifery practices and hospitals. Some home

birth providers require patients to establish hospital-based care as a precaution, ensuring smooth transfers when needed.

TELEMEDICINE ADVANCEMENTS: Fetal echocardiograms are now available in Fairbanks, reducing travel for specialized maternity care. Providers work closely with Seattle Children's Hospital and maternal-fetal medicine specialists in Anchorage, improving management of high-risk pregnancies.

MILITARY-CIVILIAN COLLABORATION: Bassett Army Hospital enhances women's and infant care through its participation in a Defense Health Agency working group, ensuring evidence-based practices, continuous staff training, and reliable medical supply chains—even during shortages.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

FOUNDATION HEALTH PARTNERS is a community-owned-and-operated healthcare organization serving the region—facilities include Fairbanks Memorial Hospital (FMH), Denali Center, and Tanana Valley Clinic. FMH is a 152-bed rural referral/sole community hospital serving patients from throughout the interior of Alaska. The hospital's Women Infant Services offers comprehensive maternity care from prenatal to postpartum with a full range of providers. The hospital is fully equipped to handle most high-risk pregnancies; local physicians consult with maternal fetal medicine physicians in Anchorage when needed. The hospital has a level 2 NICU staffed with pediatric hospitalists to provide care for sick and premature newborns. Babies can be delivered after 32 weeks. Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) perform half of hospital deliveries, supported by on-call physicians. Prenatal care is provided at the hospital-based outpatient clinic. OB/GYNs and CNMs from private practices and the tribal health clinic deliver babies at the hospital. The hospital is working to recruit an OB hospitalist who can support deliveries for all of the practices to reduce the on-call burden for small practices. The hospital provides lactation support and behavioral health services.

BASSETT ARMY HOSPITAL in Fort Wainwright is the headquarters for Army medicine in Alaska and is where most of the 25,000 active-duty soldiers, family members,

STRENGTHS, cont.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR MATERNAL

HEALTH: Beyond clinical care, a weekly lactation support group meets at a local café, fostering peer support and education for breastfeeding mothers.

STATEWIDE QUALITY INITIATIVES: Fairbanks providers actively contribute to the Alaska Perinatal Quality Collaborative (AKPQC), working to reduce OB hemorrhage rates, improve transfer processes for community births, and address substance-affected pregnancies and newborns.

CHALLENGES

PROVIDER SHORTAGES: A shortage of OB/GYNs, pediatricians, and maternity care specialists makes it difficult to recruit and retain medical professionals.

DELAYS IN PRENATAL CARE: Limited provider availability and delays in Medicaid eligibility determinations can result in wait times of 2-4 weeks for a first prenatal appointment. Many women are unaware they can receive care while their Medicaid application is pending, leading some to start prenatal care after the first trimester.

LIMITED BIRTH OPTIONS: The closure of the Fairbanks birth center has reduced alternatives to hospital deliveries. Families now have only two options—home births or hospital-based deliveries.

GAPS IN PERINATAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

SERVICES: There is a shortage of providers specializing in postpartum mood disorders and substance use disorder treatment, particularly those accepting Medicaid. This leaves many women without necessary mental health support during pregnancy and postpartum.

STAFFING CHALLENGES AT BASSETT ARMY

HOSPITAL: Frequent staff turnover, particularly during transfer seasons, disrupts continuity of care and strains maternity services for military families stationed in Fairbanks.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

and retirees from all branches of the military receive care. The women's health clinic provides comprehensive prenatal through postpartum care. Certified nurse-midwives and OB/GYNs provide both clinic care and deliveries at the hospital. The hospital performs deliveries at 36 weeks gestation and does not have a NICU or after hours anesthesia so high risk pregnancies are transferred to FMH. Due to staffing shortages on the labor and delivery unit, there are times when all births must occur at FMH.

BIRTH CENTER AND HOME BIRTHS

Alaska Family Health and Birth Center offered prenatal care and birth center and home deliveries until 2023 when they closed due to staffing issues.

Golden Heart Community Midwifery and two other practices specialize in home births with certified direct-entry midwives (CDMs). They provide prenatal care and low risk deliveries. Beginning at 36 weeks they do an extended home visit in preparation for home birth. Clients must live within 40 minutes from FMH. With the closure of the birth center, the direct-entry midwives providing home births are operating at full capacity.

PERINATAL CARE PROVIDERS

Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center provides comprehensive outpatient services to the Alaska Native population in Interior Alaska including prenatal and postpartum care with family medicine physicians and

RECOMMENDATIONS / OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

ENHANCE MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE

SCREENING: Standardize screening for mental health and substance use disorders during pregnancy and postpartum by integrating tools like the 4 P's into electronic health records. Without a standardized tool, providers rely on informal questioning, which may lead to missed diagnoses or delayed treatment.

EXPAND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & ADDICTION

SERVICES: Invest in behavioral health and addiction medicine to improve treatment options, recovery programs, and referral pathways to help people transition into stable environments during pregnancy and postpartum.

STRENGTHEN MATERNITY CARE WORKFORCE:

Prioritize recruitment and retention of OB/GYNs, certified nurse-midwives, and family medicine physicians with obstetric training to ensure timely access to prenatal and delivery care.

ADDRESS MEDICAID PROCESSING DELAYS:

Streamline Medicaid eligibility determinations to ensure pregnant individuals can access early prenatal care without delays.

STRENGTHEN TELEHEALTH FOR MATERNITY

CARE: Advocate for expanded telehealth legislation to improve access to specialized maternity care services.

INCREASE BIRTH OPTIONS: Reopening the Fairbanks birth center or expanding certified nurse midwives to support out-of-hospital birth options would provide families with more maternity care choices.

Access to medication-assisted treatment during pregnancy

A BRIGHT SPOT in Fairbanks is access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder. Tanana Valley Clinic (TVC) offers a medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program, which combines pharmacological treatment with behavioral therapy to address substance use disorders. This program aims to help individuals struggling with addiction by providing a holistic approach that addresses both the physical and behavioral aspects of addiction. At a provider's request, pregnant people are able to be given priority to be seen immediately. In Fairbanks, more providers are able to prescribe buprenorphine since many have completed the waiver process.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

deliveries at FMH. There are four private practice OB/GYNs and two hospital-based physicians that currently deliver babies at the hospital working at the following practices: Chena Health, Interior Woman's Health, Dr. Lawrason, and Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center.

Bassett employs their own OBGYNs who do clinics and are on call for deliveries.

Midwives play an important role in maternity care with certified nurse-midwives working with most of the OB/GYN providers.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

There are a few options for maternal mental health support in the Fairbanks area including therapy and medication management services. **Mama Bear Clinical Services LLC** provides both in-person and telehealth options for mothers. Additionally, there are three local certified Perinatal Mental Health Professionals listed in the Postpartum Support International (PSI)'s provider directory at [postpartum.net](https://www.postpartum.net).

