



SOUTHWEST REGION

Aleutians East Borough, Aleutians West Census Area, Bristol Bay Borough, Dillingham Census Area, Kodiak Island Borough, and Lake and Peninsula Borough

REGION OVERVIEW

The Southwest region is a vast and diverse area. The total estimated population is 28,468 and includes an area of approximately 64,000 square miles. A remote and rugged region of the state, it is characterized by dramatic coastlines, volcanic islands, extensive fisheries, and strong Indigenous cultures. The maritime climate brings frequent storms, particularly along the Aleutian chain, while inland areas experience colder winters and milder summers. Many communities are only accessible by boat or plane, reinforcing strong subsistence traditions.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Southwest region of Alaska is home to Yup'ik, Alutiiq, and Aleut peoples, each with rich traditions and deep connections to the land and sea. These cultures emphasize subsistence practices, community resilience, and intergenerational knowledge sharing. Fishing, hunting, and gathering remain central to both cultural identity and local economies. The fishing industry plays an important role in the region. In Kodiak, Coast Guard families stationed there are an important part of the community and add to the number of births in the hospital.

MATERNAL HEALTH DATA SUMMARY

This region does not have a healthcare hub but is served by hospitals and clinics that all transfer care to Anchorage with no interaction between providers in the region. Maternal health indicators are similar to statewide trends, including prenatal care access, infant mortality, and preterm labor. Cesarean rates are slightly lower, but smoking

during pregnancy is nearly twice as high. Only one hospital in the region offers labor and delivery; 85% of residents give birth outside the region, and 3.3% of births occur out of state—more than double the statewide rate. There is a clear need for expanded prenatal care, smoking cessation programs, and improved postpartum and neonatal services.

	Southwest	Statewide
General fertility rate	57.8	65.0
Teen birth rate	14.9	16.3
Preterm births	10.3%	10.0%
Low birth weight infants	6.5%	6.7%
Prenatal care in first trimester	72.6%	73.3%
Adequate of better prenatal care	65.2%	66.6%
Cesarean births among low-risk pregnancies	17.2%	18.5%
Cesarean births	20.3%	23.1%
Cigarette smoking during pregnancy	16.4%	9.3%
Infant mortality rate (2014-2023)	6.7	6.4
Crude Birth Rate	10.3	13.2
Average annual births	295	8,758
Medicaid Births (average annual)	175	5,128
% of births to Medicaid	59%	54%
Out of state births to resident Alaskans	49	578
% of resident births	3.3%	1.2%

85%
of residents
give birth outside
the region

All data
2019-2023 unless
otherwise noted.

SYSTEM OF CARE

Each subregion works to meet maternity care needs in a unique way. Only one hospital offers labor and delivery services so most residents must travel to Anchorage for delivery. Prenatal care occurs in regional hubs and clinics, often staffed by Community Health Aides and Practitioners (CHA/Ps), nurse practitioners, and family medicine doctors. Providers may also travel to rural communities for prenatal visits to help bridge gaps in care, ensuring that women in isolated areas receive timely ultrasounds, lab work, and risk assessments without needing to make frequent, costly trips to a hospital. OB case managers play a crucial role in tracking patients from the time of a positive pregnancy test through delivery.

Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA) provides apartments in Kodiak where patients can stay with family members during the perinatal period.

Telehealth remains a useful tool for follow-up visits, consultations, and remote support, particularly for those in more isolated locations with in-person prenatal care, the preferred method.

Births in Southwest Region Hospitals/Birth Centers

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5 year total	5 year average	% of statewide births	% change over 5 years
Providence Kodiak Island Medical Center	94	133	118	122	83	550	110		-11.70%
Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation	25	**	**	**	**	25+	12		
Total Births in Southwest Hospitals	119	133	118	122	83	575	122	1%	-30.25%
Total Births to Region Residents	278	332	303	308	255	1476	295	3%	-8.27%
# Births leaving region	159	199	185	186	172	901	173		
% of births leaving region	57%	60%	61%	60%	67%	61%	59%		

** Under 10 births

STRENGTHS

PROVIDENCE KODIAK ISLAND MEDICAL CENTER (PKIMC): PKIMC excels in patient safety by tracking qualitative blood loss in deliveries and utilizing evidence-based obstetric practices. The facility conducts quarterly OB drills with simulation mannequins, ensuring staff preparedness. Internal labor and delivery training strengthens team competency, and LifeMed and Guardian provide on-island medevac support for urgent cases.

BRISTOL BAY AREA HEALTH CORPORATION (BBAHC): The hospital is well-equipped for emergency deliveries, featuring two Panda warmers and bubble CPAP systems and offers in-house medevac services, ensuring timely transport when needed. Staff receive Neonatal Resuscitation Program (NRP), Advanced Life

Support in Obstetrics (ALSO), and STABLE training, maintaining high standards of care.

KODIAK AREA NATIVE ASSOCIATION (KANA): Providers maintain delivery proficiency by training at the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC) and they also benefit from real-time specialist consultations via TigerText. Monthly calls with ANMC OB specialists provide continuous learning and case reviews, ensuring coordinated, high-quality maternity care.

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

Providence Kodiak Island Medical Center (PKIMC), Kodiak:

PKIMC is a 25-bed critical access hospital that is part of the Providence Health system. The hospital staff includes primary care doctors, surgeons, and specialists in family medicine, pediatrics, general practice, internal medicine, obstetrics, and radiology. The birthing center features four family birthing suites and offers cesarean births, epidurals, and VBACs. OB services follow a hospitalist schedule with four physicians trained in C-section deliveries. The hospital does not have a NICU and can only deliver babies from 36 weeks' gestation. PKIMC has certified lactation consultants, nurses, and trained peer counselors available seven days a week to support breastfeeding and bottle-feeding. All Kodiak families, regardless of where the baby is born, can enroll in the free Kodiak KINDNESS Project, which offers breastfeeding and infant nutrition support throughout the baby's first year.

Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA):

KANA operates a tribal health clinic serving the island. Two family medicine physicians provide prenatal care and deliveries in Kodiak or refer patients to Anchorage when needed. Rural tribal residents must travel via fixed-wing or float planes to reach Kodiak 2-4 weeks before due date. KANA providers conduct home village visits when possible and use telehealth with nurse support for prenatal assessments.

CHALLENGES

STAFFING CONSISTENCY: Reliance on travel nurses affects continuity of care and staff familiarity with community-specific needs.

LIMITED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES: Local providers have fewer opportunities for hands-on experience with complex obstetric cases.

EMERGENCY DELIVERY CONFIDENCE: Due to the infrequent occurrence of emergency deliveries, staff may feel uncertain in high-pressure situations.

MEDICAID TRAVEL DELAYS: Non-urgent Medicaid travel requests require 7–10 days for approval, posing challenges for expectant mothers who need to relocate for delivery but face delays in securing transportation.

RECOMMENDATIONS / OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

ENHANCE LABOR SUPPORT TRAINING: Implementing “Spinning Babies” training would improve staff skills in supporting laboring mothers and promote more effective birthing techniques.

EXPAND LOCAL DELIVERY OPTIONS: Reopening delivery services in Dillingham could enhance access to maternity care and reduce the need for long-distance travel.

STRENGTHEN EMERGENCY READINESS: Supporting providers to receive training and mentorship by spending time in higher volume birthing hospitals would build confidence for emergency deliveries.

STREAMLINE MEDICAID TRAVEL APPROVALS: Advocating for faster approval processes would reduce logistical barriers for expectant mothers needing travel support.

“At KANA, we are patient-centered. Our organization values all care but particularly prioritizes our vulnerable populations, including pediatrics, maternity, and elders.”

— Dr. Gray, KANA

MATERNITY CARE PROVIDERS

Kodiak Community Health Center (KCHC):

KCHC provides prenatal care through family medicine physicians and advanced practice registered nurses.

Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation

(BBAHC), Dillingham: BBAHC, a Tribal Health Organization, provides healthcare services to 28 communities and operates 22 clinics in the Bristol Bay region. These villages are grouped into four sub-regions: Nushagak River & Bay Central, Southern, Western, and Kvichak Bay & North Side Peninsula. CHA/Ps offer primary and emergency care in the villages, with patients traveling to Dillingham for more advanced care. BBAHC's Kakanak Hospital is a 16-bed critical access hospital providing inpatient and outpatient services, emergency care, medevac, dental, pharmacy, radiology, lab, mental health, and substance abuse services. Prenatal care is available; however, labor and delivery services were discontinued in 2019. Pregnant people are referred to ANMC or other Anchorage hospitals and must travel 2-4 weeks before their due date. Hospital staff are trained in emergency deliveries.

Iliuliuk Family and Health Services (IFHS),

Unalaska: Unalaska is 800 air miles from Anchorage and the largest community in the Aleutian Islands with a population of 4,200 (2020). There is no hospital. IFHS provides prenatal care, including dating ultrasounds. Pregnant people must travel to receive anatomy scans and must leave to give birth

by 36 weeks gestation. Monthly calls with an OB physician help local staff guide prenatal care planning. Emergency medevac services are available when needed.

HOME BIRTHS:

Home births in the region are rare, with most unplanned. Kodiak has a part-time private practice CNM who offers services.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS:

PKIMC screens using the Edinburgh scale and refers to services provided by psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners. Bristol Bay operates extensive behavioral health programs throughout the Bristol Bay region. Other clinics offer on-site and itinerant behavioral services.