

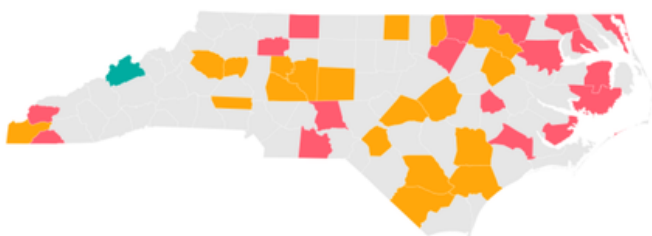
EXPANDING ACCESS TO CARE PRIOR TO PREGNANCY

WHY DOES ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE MATTER BEFORE PREGNANCY?

The beginning of August marks **National Health Center Week** which celebrates community health centers and the important role they play in improving access to healthcare for communities across the country.

These centers help reduce barriers to care by providing affordable, comprehensive healthcare services close to where people live and work.

Access to health care is an important part of preconception health, as care prior to pregnancy can help manage chronic health conditions, provide recommended screenings and vaccinations, support mental and emotional health, and connect individuals with resources they may need for pregnancy. However, many communities in North Carolina are considered maternity care deserts.



1 IN 6 COUNTIES
IN NORTH CAROLINA ARE
MATERNITY CARE DESERTS

■ Maternity care desert ■ Low access ■ Moderate access ■ Full access

A maternity care desert is an area with limited or no access to hospitals offering obstetric care, birth centers, or maternity care providers. Community health centers help bridge these gaps in care!

WHERE CAN YOU RECEIVE PRECONCEPTION CARE?

Preconception care is available in many healthcare settings across North Carolina. No matter your health goals or where you live, there are multiple places where you can receive preconception-focused care.

Primary Care Practices Family medicine and internal medicine providers offer annual checkups, preventative screenings, chronic disease management, vaccinations, and preconception counseling.

Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) FQHCs provide affordable primary and preventative care regardless of insurance status. Many centers also offer reproductive health services, behavioral health counseling, and care coordination.

Local Health Departments Health Departments can offer services such as family planning, STI testing and treatment, immunizations, reproductive health services, and health education.

OBGYN Practices Obstetric and gynecology practices can provide routine reproductive healthcare, preconception counseling, preventative screenings, and reproductive life planning services. An OBGYN can also serve as a primary care provider.

Advanced Practice Providers Nurse practitioners (NPs), certified nurse-midwives (CNMs), and physician assistants (PAs) provide preventative and reproductive healthcare in many of the settings listed above.

SMALL STEPS TO TAKE TODAY!

Improving access to care starts with knowing what resources are available and taking small steps to prioritize your health. First, identify a healthcare provider or clinic that meets your needs. This can be a primary care practice, community health center, local health department, or OB-GYN office. Once you have established care, schedule a preconception health visit. If cost, transportation, language, or finding a provider has been a barrier, ask about available support services such as financial, interpretation, patient navigation, or telehealth services. If you live in a community with limited access to these care options, your established provider can help connect you with other specialized care moving forward.

The Ready for Life Community Health Champions program is recruiting a new cohort of preconception health champions for Fall 2026!

This program is open to individuals living in North Carolina Perinatal Care Regions 2, 5, & 6 and provides up to \$500 in compensation among program completion.

For more information and to sign up for our Fall Cohort, [click HERE](#) or email ssandhir@marchofdimes.org

