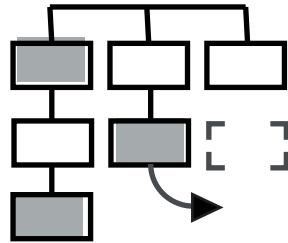


Effects of Regionalization

Since 2000, there have been at least twenty rural maternity care services that have closed in BC. These closures are occurring for various reasons, including:



Shortages of maternity care providers



Health care system restructuring



Fiscal constraints

Thus, a growing number of rural women in BC must now travel away from their home communities to give birth. This can be problematic to mothers, babies, families and communities because:

Babies born to mothers from rural communities where there are no maternity care services may be less healthy at birth than babies born in their home communities. Rural women who must travel from home communities to give birth may suffer physically and emotionally because of anxiety, and the uncertainty around planning for birth. These effects seem most pronounced in women with limited social and economic resources.

As researchers, we see the need to build evidence-based knowledge in order to provide necessary services for women, babies, families, communities and our health system resources. We aimed to investigate the challenges facing the provision of rural maternity care in a comprehensive way from multiple perspectives. Health services literature suggest that within a regionalized system small rural maternity services can offer safe care as long as there is an efficient way to transport women during labour and delivery when necessary. However, there are many challenges in the way of sustaining small rural maternity care practices.

We believe it is extremely important to improve understanding of the diverse causes and consequences for British Columbians trying to access, provide, administer and make policy decisions about rural maternity care services.

