Objective:
To track the impacts of COVID-19 on wait times and other aspects of abortion healthcare in Wisconsin compared to bordering states with varying state-level restrictions.

Methods:
From March 25 to June 17, 2020, investigators posing as 8-weeks-pregnant clients made weekly mystery calls to 29 abortion clinics in Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, and upper Michigan to determine wait times and any COVID-related changes to abortion services.

Results:
COVID’s influence on abortion services in Wisconsin was conditioned by current state restrictions. For example:

- Iowa healthcare centers consistently recommended medication abortion by way of telemedicine because it reduced contact, but Wisconsin clinics could not offer patients this option.
- Average wait times were often longer and more confusing in Wisconsin, where existing laws only allow callers to get firm dates for the first, mandated in-person counseling visit—but rarely for the abortion appointment itself.
- Clinics in other states were often able to schedule patients sooner, with at least one less visit, due to fewer legal restrictions.

Conclusion:
Amidst the COVID pandemic, Wisconsin residents were unable to access in-state telemedicine abortion services that could have made mandated abortion counseling safer and medication abortion more accessible.

Key Takeaways
- People seeking abortions in Wisconsin already face many obstacles to timely and affordable care.
- These limitations were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In surrounding states, clinics recommended medication abortion and/or abortion counseling via telemedicine services.
- In Wisconsin, neither clinics nor patients have those options, making abortion care more confusing and less accessible.

Contact:
baalvarez@wisc.edu