

# CORE BRIEF

## Assessing access to abortion services for Wisconsin residents post-Roe

August 2022



### Summary

In a [new CORE analysis](#), researchers estimate the impact of cessation of abortion services in June 2022 in Wisconsin on distance to care for state residents. They predict a decline in the number of abortions and an increase in births in the Wisconsin counties most affected by this post-*Roe* change to the reproductive health services landscape.

### Effects of Prior Changes to Abortion Care Availability in Wisconsin

[Previous CORE research](#) by Drs. Jason Fletcher and Joanna Venator [documented](#) some of the effects of abortion healthcare clinic closures in Wisconsin between 2010 and 2017. They found that two clinic closures, one in Green Bay in 2013 and one in Appleton in 2015, increased travel distances to abortion care for thousands of Wisconsinites. These closures left Wisconsin with only three abortion healthcare facilities (until 2018, when a healthcare facility in Sheboygan began offering medication abortion services). The investigators documented that a 100-mile increase in distance to the nearest provider was associated with a 30 percent reduction in abortions and three percent increase in births.

These results suggested that even when abortion was legal and available in Wisconsin, clinic closures led some Wisconsinites to carry pregnancies to term when they would have obtained an abortion if they lived closer to care.

### Anticipated Effects of Recent Cessation of Abortion Services

The team has [updated its research](#) in light of the recent U.S. Supreme Court [Dobbs decision](#), which led healthcare centers in Wisconsin to stop providing abortion care.

Immediately prior to that decision, four reproductive healthcare centers in Wisconsin offered abortion services: two in Milwaukee, one in Madison, and one in Sheboygan. However, with the release of the *Dobbs* decision on June 24, 2022, which overturned *Roe v. Wade* and made Wisconsin's 1849 abortion ban potentially enforceable, all four centers immediately ceased offering abortion care.

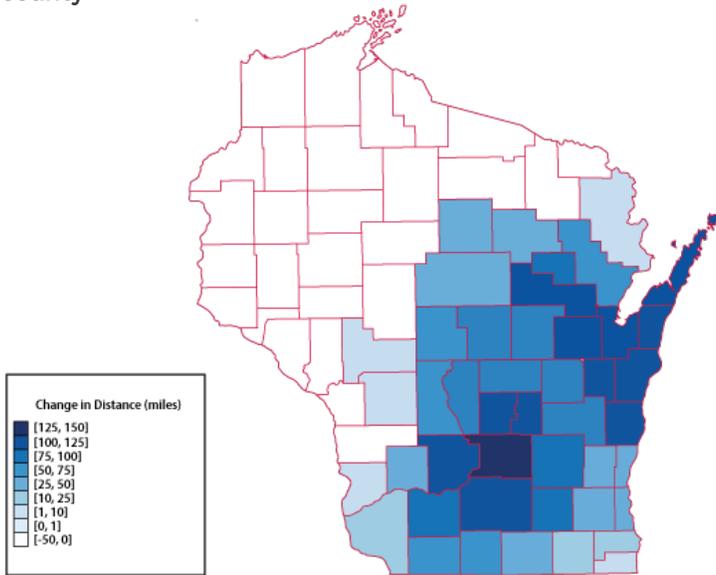
Based on findings from their pre-*Roe* analysis, **the investigators estimate major effects of this suspension of abortion services. They find that out of 72 Wisconsin counties, 42 will experience an increase in distance to abortion care, with an average increase of 82 miles for residents of these counties.** (See Figure 1.) (The remaining 30 counties were already closer to out-of-state care than in-state care, which is why their travel distances did not change.) Wisconsin's two most populous counties, Milwaukee and Dane, will experience 70-mile and 120-mile increases, respectively. These changes are particularly important because residents of these two counties represented [56 percent of the state's abortion patients](#) in 2020.



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Figure 1. Change in travel distance to nearest abortion care facility after cessation of services in June 2022, by county



The investigators use the rates of decline they found in their prior analyses to predict abortion trends in the current environment, in which all abortion services in Wisconsin are suspended. **The investigators predict at least a 20 percent reduction in the number of abortions across the state, including 20 percent in Milwaukee and 30 percent in Dane County. They also predict 30 percent reductions in Brown, Columbia, and Manitowoc counties, among others.**

**The investigators also predict an increase in the number of births due to lack of abortion care services.** Using findings from their pre-*Roe* analyses, the researchers’ model suggests that the suspension of abortion services could lead to a **two to four percent increase in the number of births in Wisconsin.** The counties with the largest expected increases in births are Columbia and Dane, which they estimate will experience the greatest increases in travel distance to abortion care.

These effects are large, and even larger than those resulting from previous closures in 2013 and 2015. Because providers offering services prior to the *Dobbs* decision were in Wisconsin’s population centers in Milwaukee and Madison, suspension of abortion services at these sites affects many more people than previous closures in smaller cities. However, despite their large magnitude, these predicted effects are very likely conservative estimates. Abortion healthcare providers in Illinois, Minnesota, and other bordering states anticipate [long wait times](#) due to an influx of patients from many restricted states, including Wisconsin. These wait times will put abortion out of reach for some Wisconsinites, as they may be too late in pregnancy to have an abortion, or the costs of an abortion later in pregnancy may be unaffordable. Others may be discouraged from seeking care across state lines due to fear of legal retribution or because they do not know that abortion is still legal elsewhere.

Decreases in abortion care access will most strongly affect Wisconsinites who already face day-to-day challenges. People living on low incomes, especially those living farthest away from care, will be less able to raise funds to cross state lines. Moreover, given that Milwaukee will lose abortion care, people in Wisconsin’s largest Black community will be disproportionately impacted by these changes.

In sum, CORE investigators’ updated analysis suggests that the recent cessation of abortion services will make thousands of Wisconsinites unable to access desired abortion services, leading to an increase in full-term pregnancies and births. [Research](#) has shown major negative health and wellbeing consequences for people unable to obtain abortion care.

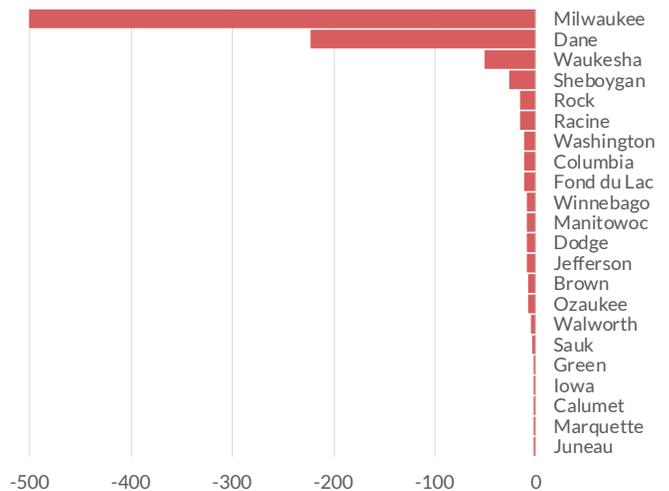


Figure 2. Decrease in number of abortions after cessation of services in June 2022, by county