

BEYOND THE BELTWAY



Tip Sheet: Understanding Contraceptive Deserts

Our research has found more than 19 million women who are eligible for publicly funded contraception don't have *reasonable access* to the *full range of birth control methods* where they live. That is, these 19 million women live in what we call [contraceptive deserts](#).

In reality, this means that to get the method of birth control that works for them, they have to search for a clinic and often have to travel more than an hour to get there—which may require extra gas or bus fare, time away from school, unpaid time off work, extra child care, etc.

Moreover, roughly 1.3 million women, a subset of the 19 million women in need, live in counties without a single clinic that offers the full range of contraceptive methods.

To define a few of the terms used above:

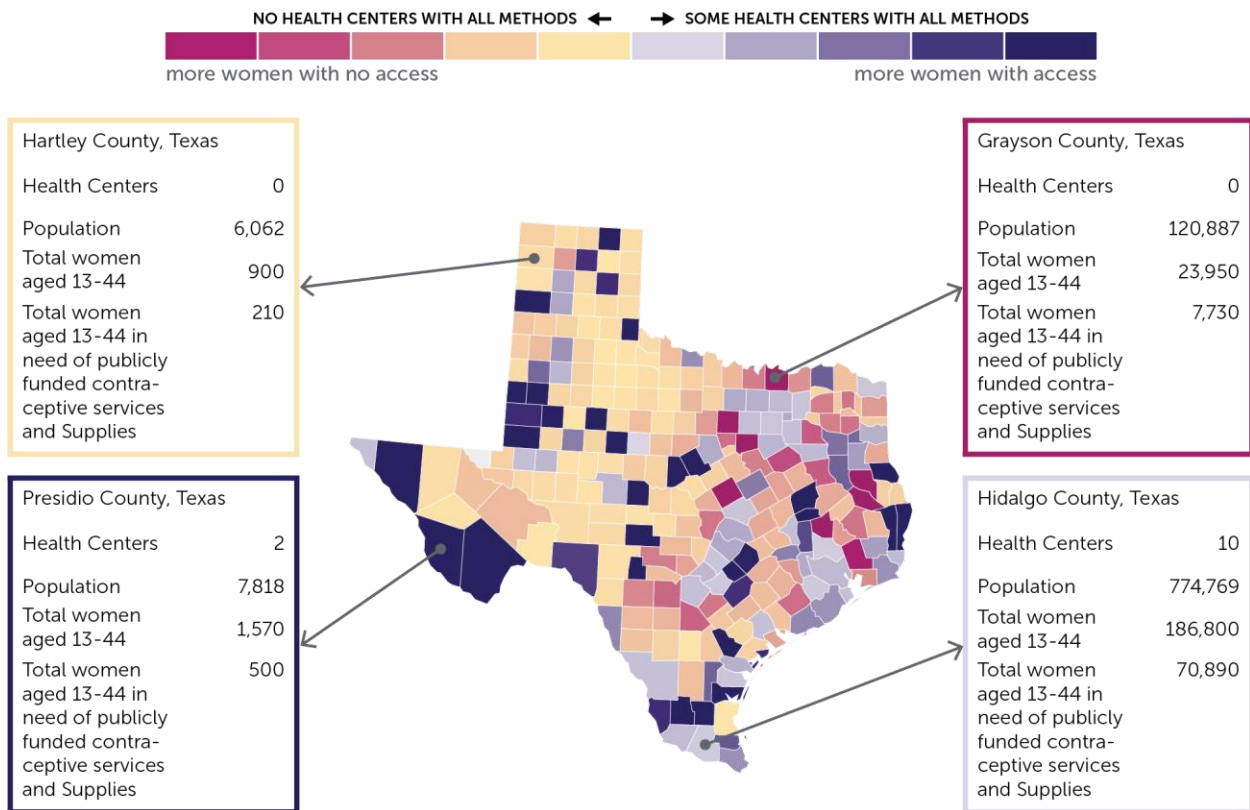
- “reasonable access” means there is at least one health center or provider for every 1,000 women in need of publicly funded contraception.
- “full range of methods” includes all FDA-approved contraceptive method categories, including IUDs and implants (we use IUDs and implants as a proxy for the full range of methods, since clinics and providers that can stock the most costly methods are also likely to stock less expensive ones).¹
- “women in need” refers to women eligible for publicly funded contraception (generally those with income below 250% of the federal poverty level).

Taking a Closer Look at One State to Understand the Concept of Contraceptive Deserts

On the next page is a map of the contraceptive deserts across Texas, which like many states has counties that represent the spectrum of access.

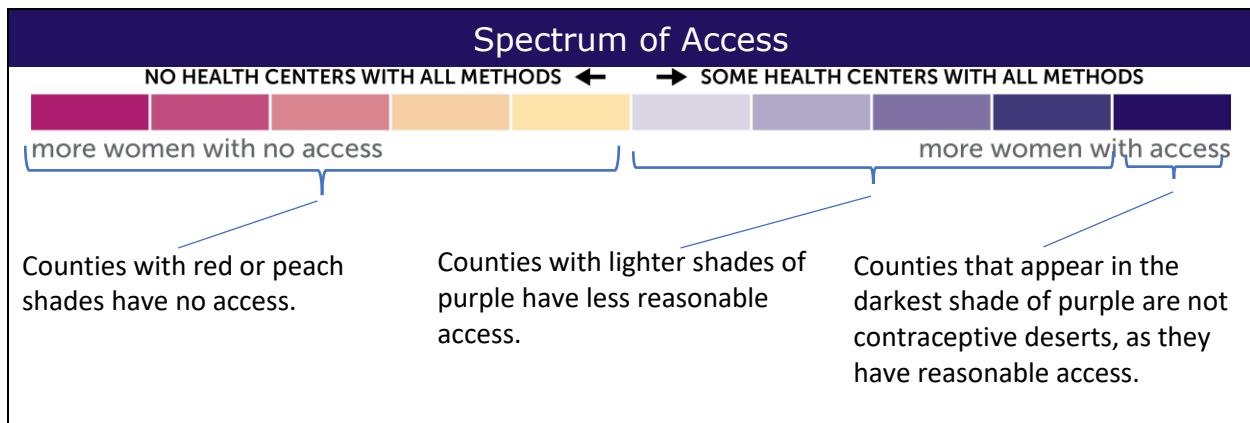
¹ See the FDA Birth Control Guide at <https://www.fda.gov/media/135111/download>

Spectrum of Access



First, look at the counties that fall on the left side of the spectrum (in pinks and yellows). Those are counties without any clinics that offer the full range of methods. One of the darkest pink counties, Grayson County, is in North Texas. It is dark pink because it has zero clinics that offer the full range of methods and a large number of women (nearly 8,000) in need. Let's contrast Grayson County with Hartley County in the Texas Panhandle, which also has no clinics that offer the full range of methods. Hartley county appears in the light yellow/peach color, not because it has more clinics but because there are substantially fewer women (210) in need living within that county.

Next, on the right side of the spectrum (in light and dark purples) are counties that do have clinics that offer the full range of contraceptive methods. Let's look at Presidio County in West Texas along the Rio Grande; it is one of the darkest purple counties. There are two clinics in the county and approximately 500 women in need; a sufficient number of clinics to provide reasonable access to serve these women. In fact, this means that the darkest purple counties are **not** contraceptive deserts.



Now let's look at Hidalgo County, located in South Texas (in lighter purple) along the Texas/Mexico border. The county has 10 clinics to serve nearly 71,000 women in need—a much higher ratio of women in need to clinics—when compared to Presidio county. This is why Hidalgo County is a much lighter shade of purple than Presidio County.

To learn more about issues surrounding contraceptive access, go to our digital toolkit: <https://powertodecide.org/Access-Toolkit>

For more background on the data and methods included in our birth control access map, see: https://powertodecide.org/system/files/resources/primary-download/Contraceptive%20Deserts_Handout.pdf