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Change in Distance to Nearest Abortion Facility in Wisconsin, 2010 to 2017

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Preliminary Report by the Wisconsin Policy Analysis Lab
Jason Fletcher, Jordan Madden, Emma Romell, and Zeyu Wei

Introduction and Background

Many states have experienced closures of abortion clinics in response to a variety of circumstances, such as legislative acts or threats of violence. A recent prominent example occurred in Texas following the 2013 passage of Texas House Bill 2, which banned abortion after 20 weeks, required doctors to have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital, and held abortion clinics to the same standards as other surgical centers.¹ The Supreme Court struck down the law in 2016 for placing an undue burden on women seeking abortion care.² Still, Grossman et al. (2017) documented a decline in providers from 41 in 2012 to 17 in June 2016, including a reduction of abortion by 14% between 2013 and 2014. For this report, we collected information on abortion service provider locations in Wisconsin, and those nearest to the state border in Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa. This report documents changes in distances to the nearest abortion provider for Wisconsin residents over the period 2010-2017.

Since 2011, Governor Scott Walker and the Republican-led Wisconsin state legislature have passed a series of bills that reduced the funding to family planning clinics. The 2011 state budget eliminated all state funding for Planned Parenthood, and in 2013 the legislature passed a requirement for all abortion providers to have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital.³ The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the law in 2015 for placing an undue burden on women seeking care,⁴ but not before the Planned Parenthood in Green Bay closed. In 2016, Governor Walker signed two additional bills into law preventing Planned Parenthood from using Title X funding for family planning services⁵ and reducing the Medicaid reimbursements made to Planned Parenthood for contraceptive care.⁶ By 2017, only three clinics providing abortion care remained - two Planned Parenthoods in Milwaukee and Madison and Affiliated Medical Services in Milwaukee.

Methods and Sources

In order to document the location of abortion providers in Wisconsin in 2010, and when they closed, we utilized LexisNexis, the largest database for legal and journalistic documents. A search of all articles containing the term “abortion clinic” published by the *Wisconsin State Journal* and *The Capital Times* from January 1, 2010 to January 1, 2017 was completed, and through this method we located articles that

¹ Manny Fernandez, “[Abortion Restrictions Become Law in Texas, but Opponents Will Press Fight](#),” *The New York Times*, July 18, 2013.

² *Whole Woman’s Health, et al., Petitioners, v. John Hellerstedt, Commissioner, Texas Department of State Health Services, et al.*, 15-274 U.S. 2296 (2016).

³ Daniel Ritsche, “[Abortion Laws in Wisconsin](#),” Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, December 2015.

⁴ *Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, Inc., et al., Plaintiffs–Appellees, v. Brad D. Schimel, Attorney General of Wisconsin, et al., Defendants–Appellants*, 15-1736 U.S. (2015).

⁵ A.B. 310, Sess. of 2015 (Wis. 2015). Accessed via <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2015/related/acts/151.pdf>

⁶ S.B. 238, Sess. of 2015 (Wis 2015). Accessed via <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2015/related/acts/152.pdf>

confirm (1) four Wisconsin counties had abortion providers in 2010⁷, (2) Brown county lost its provider in 2013⁸, and (3) Outagamie county lost its provider in 2016⁹.

In order to measure the distance individuals in Wisconsin need to travel in order to receive abortion care, we also located abortion providers in nearby states: Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, and Illinois. Since the availability of service providers in Michigan, Iowa, and Illinois did not impact our distance measures for Wisconsin residents, we focused attention on service providers in Minnesota. Confirmation that providers nearest to the Wisconsin state border in Minnesota were offering abortion services from 2010 to 2017 involved additional searching. Women’s Health Center in Duluth, Minnesota, was confirmed to be providing abortion care during this time frame from the “About Us” tab of their website.¹⁰ Planned Parenthood St. Paul Health Center was confirmed to be providing abortion care during this time frame through an article published by the *Star Tribune* that details Planned Parenthood’s decision to relocate their abortion services from one side of town to the other.¹¹

We use the geodist module in Stata (StataCorp), version 15 to measure distance from the centroid of each Wisconsin county to the nearest open abortion provider for both 2010 and 2016. To reflect the two provider closures in 2013 and 2016, the increased distance to nearest abortion providers from 2010 to 2017 for each county is calculated by subtracting the calculated distance for 2010 from the calculated distance for 2016. This illustrates where the increases in distances to the nearest abortion provider are most concentrated and is shown in Figure 1.

The counties are categorized into 4 groups according to changes in distance between 2010 and 2017, with 30 miles intervals. These distance intervals were chosen as a proxy for travel time. The first category represents an estimated driving time of 30 minutes or less, the second up to an hour, the third an hour and a half, the fourth over an hour and a half. Further, we categorized counties according to their calculated distance to a facility providing abortions in 2010 and 2016. Figure 2 depicts these distances for Wisconsin counties in 2010, and Figure 3 depicts these distances for Wisconsin counties in 2016. We grouped counties into 5 categories based on the distance to the nearest facility, ranging from 0 to greater than 120 miles.

Results

Table 1. Average Distance to Closest Abortion Providing Facility for Wisconsin Residents in 2010 and 2017

Distance	Obs	2010	2017	2010	2017
Miles to Closest Provider□	72	61.95	77.47		
		Number of Counties		Proportion of Counties	
Miles between 0 to 30	26	17	9	24%	13%

⁷ Lisa Subeck, “[Award Will Honor Dr. Tiller’s Trust in Women](#),” *The Capital Times*, May 31, 2010.

⁸ Associated Press, “Green Bay to Lose Sole Abortion Provider,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, July 26, 2013.

⁹ Todd Richmond, “Planned Parenthood In Appleton Closing For Good,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, Madison, WI, August 23, 2016.

¹⁰ Women’s Health Center, “[About WHC](#).”

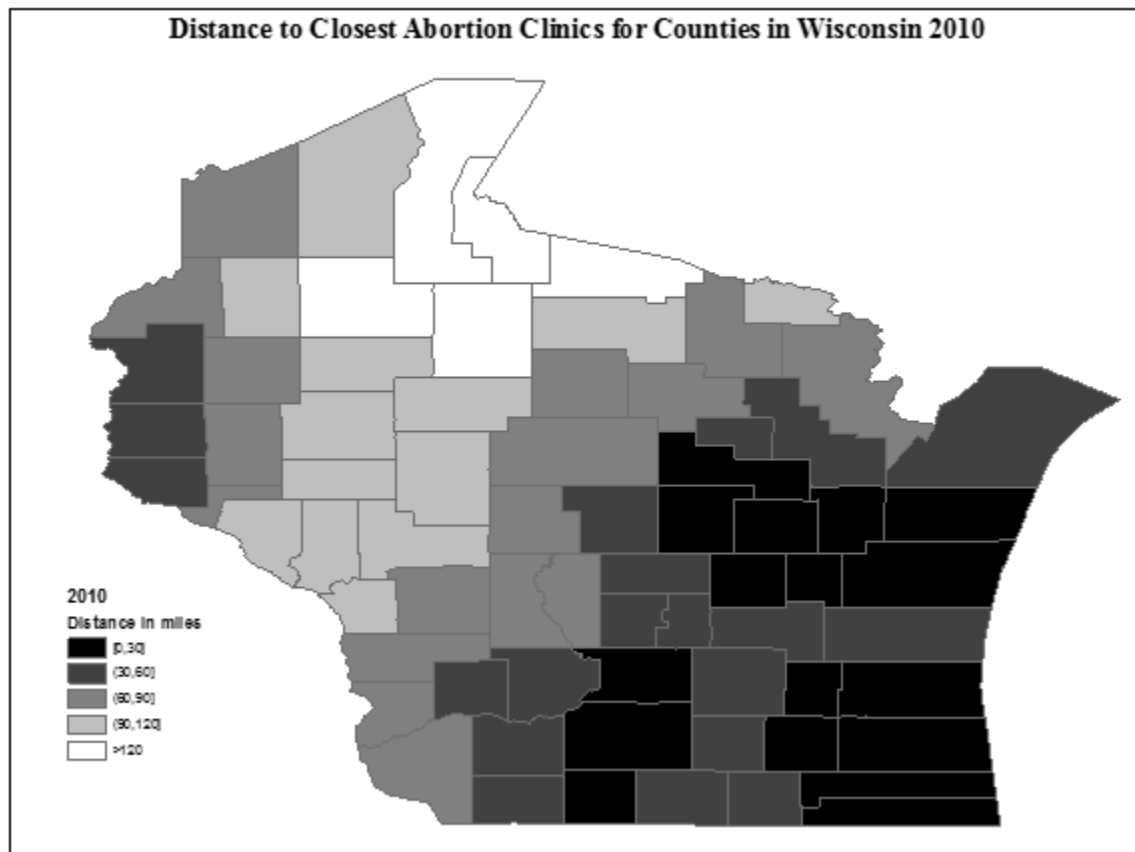
¹¹ Josephine Marcotty, “[Abortion Clinic Will Move: Foes Will, Too](#),” *StarTribune*, Minneapolis, MN, May 4, 2010.

Miles between 30 to 60	37	21	16	29%	22%
Miles between 60 to 90	34	17	17	24%	24%
Miles between 90 to 120	34	13	21	18%	29%
Miles larger than 120	13	4	9	6%	13%
Total	144	72	72	100.0%	100.0%

Our quantitative results are presented in Table 1. In 2010, we find, among the 72 counties in Wisconsin, the average county resident's distance to closest county with an abortion providing facility was 61.95 miles. We find that 17 counties (24%) were 0 to 30 miles to the closest provider, 21 counties (29%) were between 31 to 60 miles, 17 counties (24%) were between 61 and 90 miles, 13 counties (18%) were between 91 to 120 miles, and 4 (6%) were over 121 miles to the closet provider. In 2010, the average distance between a Wisconsin resident and the closest abortion facility was about 61.95 miles. As of December 31st, 2016, however, that average distance jumped about 25% to 77.4 miles between a Wisconsin resident and the closest abortion facility. This difference is statistically significant (p-value<0.01).

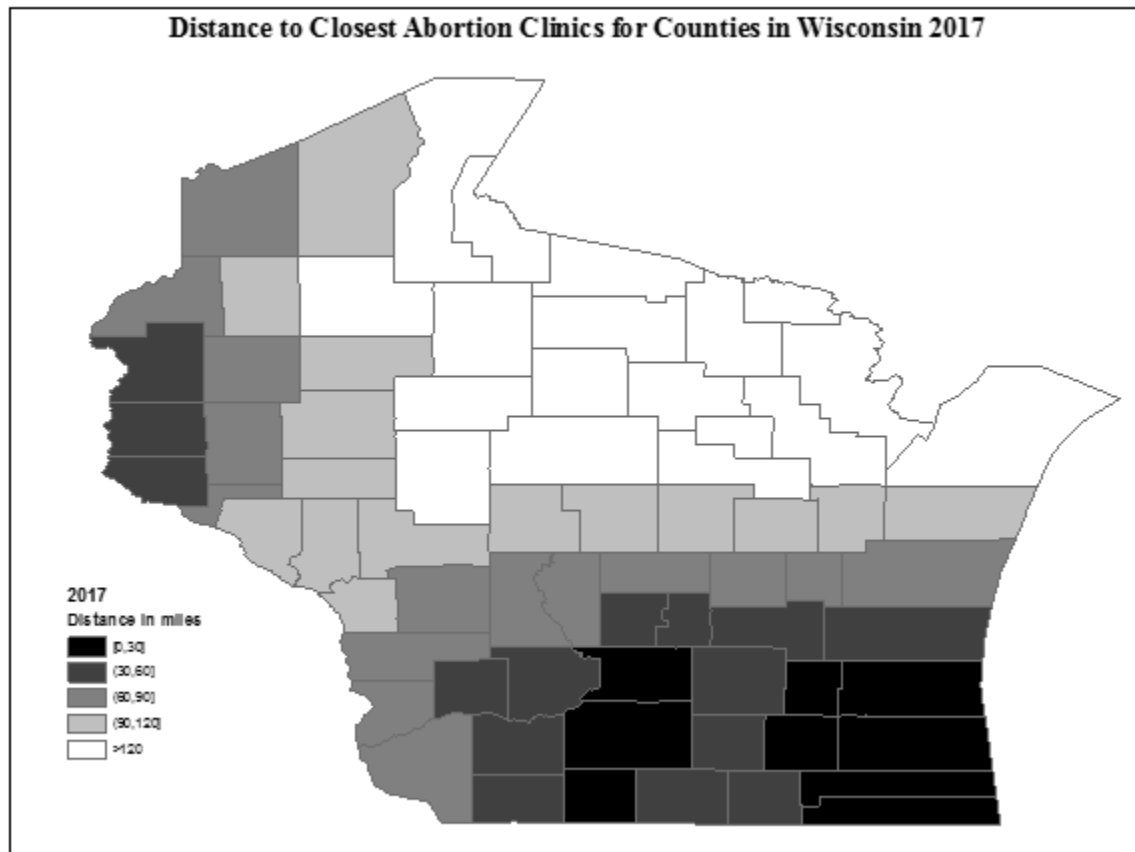
The following 4 rows indicate how many counties there are for each year that are between 31-60 miles away, 61-90 miles away, 90-120 miles away, and over 120 miles away from the nearest abortion provider. From 2010 and 2017, the number of counties that are between 0-30 miles away from their nearest abortion provider decreased by about 47% from 17 counties to only 9; the number of counties that are between 31-60 miles similarly decreased by about 24% from 21 counties in 2010 to only 16 in 2017; the number of counties that are between 61-90 miles, however, interestingly remained unchanged with 17 counties in this category for both years; the number of counties that are between 90-120 miles increased by about 62% from 13 counties in 2010 to 21 in 2017; the number of counties that are 120 miles away or more from the nearest abortion provider increased by 125% from 4 counties in 2010 to 9 in 2017.

Figure 1. Distance to Closest Abortion Provider for Counties in Wisconsin (2010)



According to Figure 1, there were 17 counties that were less than 30 miles away from their nearest abortion provider. Although this is a substantially greater proportion of counties compared to the 9 counties in 2017, these providers are relatively limited to the southern and eastern regions of Wisconsin. Counties in the northwestern region of the state are closer to abortion providers in Minnesota. The Wisconsin counties closest to the abortion providers in St. Paul are Polk, St. Croix, and Pierce; further, the Wisconsin counties closest to the abortion providers in Duluth, are Douglas, Washburn, and Bayfield. The rest of northern Wisconsin is typically closer to the providers in Minnesota or the sole provider in northern Michigan. Overall, there were 38 out of Wisconsin's 72 counties (about 53%) that were 60 miles or less from the nearest abortion provider.

Figure 2. Distance to Closest Abortion Provider for Counties in Wisconsin (2017)



According to Figure 2 above, in 2017, access to abortion providers remained the same in the northwestern region of the state, and in the south. Only 9 counties were within 30 miles of the nearest abortion provider. We measure a 47% decrease in the number of counties most near an abortion provider. Overall, only 26 counties out of Wisconsin's 72 (about 36%) were 60 miles or less from the nearest abortion provider in 2017 compared to the 38 counties (about 52%) in 2010.

Figure 3. Increased Distance to Closest Abortion Clinics from 2010-2016 for Counties in Wisconsin.

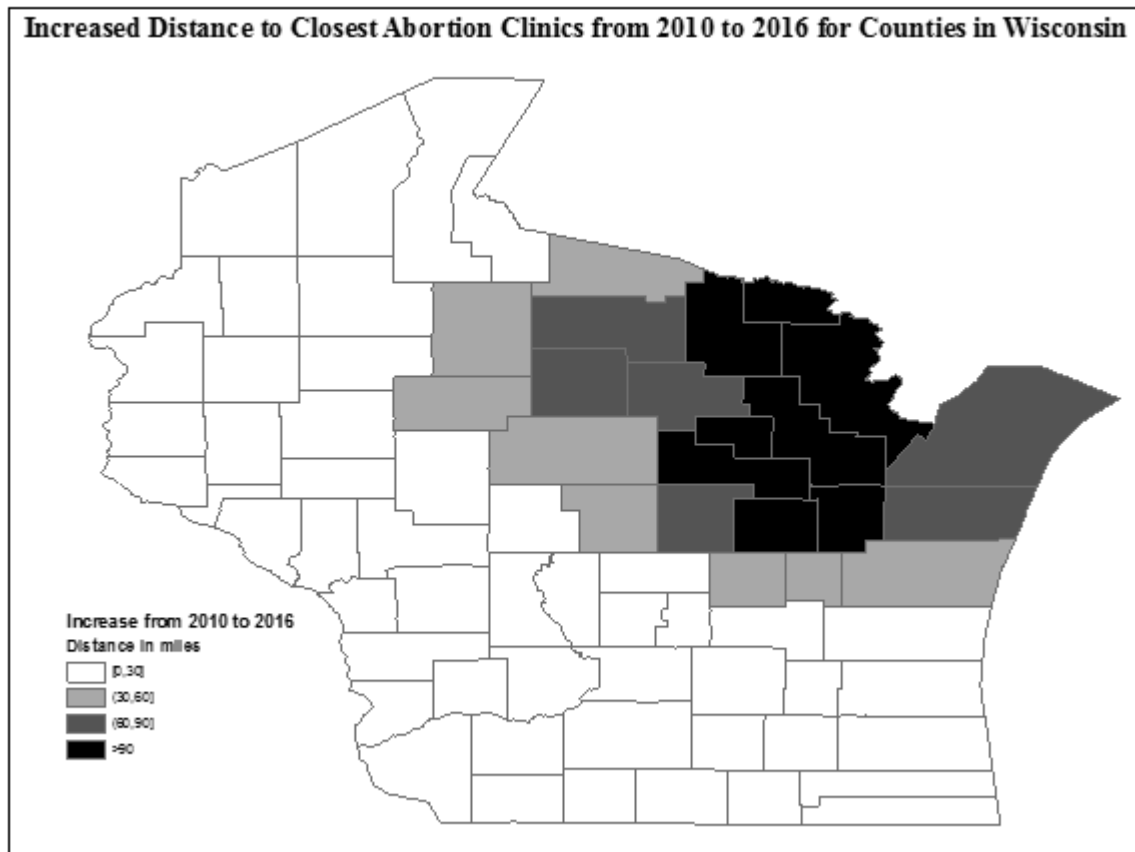


Figure 3 shows the 22 counties that experienced at least a 30 mile increase in the distance to the nearest abortion provider as a result of the abortion clinics closing in Brown and Outagamie Counties. This number includes the 14 counties that experienced at least a 60 mile increase in the distance to the nearest abortion provider and 8 counties that experienced at least a 90 mile increase.

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