Abortion attributesTexans Declined 33% After 2021 State-Level Ban on Abortion in Early Pregnancy

Austin, TX—The number of facility-based abortions that Texas residents obtained in Texas and surrounding states declined 33% after the implementation of a state-level ban on abortion in early pregnancy, according to a new study. The Texas Policy Evaluation Project (TxPEP) study, published today in the Journal of the American Medical Association, demonstrates how abortion patterns may change throughout the nation as many states have outlawed abortion care after Roe v. Wade was overturned in June 2022.

The TxPEP study, which compared abortion trends before and after Texas Senate Bill 8 (SB 8) was implemented on September 1, 2021, found that the number of in-state and out-of-state abortions combined fell from 5673 in the month before SB 8 to 3501 after—a decline of 33%. Even with more than 1000 Texas residents traveling out of state each month, out-of-state abortions did not fully offset the decrease in abortions in Texas. The total number of abortions remained lower than pre-SB8 levels through February 2022, the end of the study period. This indicates that many people were forced to travel farther away for care, self-manage their abortion, or continue a pregnancy they did not want.

SB 8—the most restrictive state-level abortion law in the U.S. when it was passed—prohibits abortion upon detection of embryonic cardiac activity, which can take place as early as five to six weeks after a person’s last menstrual period. The law also permits almost anyone to sue abortion providers and others who help someone obtain an abortion in Texas after this stage of pregnancy. Abortion is now banned in Texas, and SB 8 can still be used to bring legal charges.

During the 6-month period after SB 8, abortions at 12 weeks of pregnancy or more represented a larger percentage of out-of-state abortions for Texans over time: the share increased from 17% in September 2021 to 31% in February 2022. At this point in pregnancy, people require an in-clinic procedural abortion because they are no longer eligible to use the FDA-approved medication abortion regimen.

“As Texans’ demand for care strained out-of-state facilities, patients were pushed beyond the point at which they could get a medication abortion,” said Dr. Samuel Dickman, a co-author of the study. “Many people prefer to get abortions earlier in pregnancy, and they want to have a choice about the type of method they will use. Restrictions that force people to get care later in pregnancy undermine their reproductive freedom and create additional financial and logistical hardships for those who are able to get care in another state.”
“Our study shows how disruptive a single state’s abortion ban can be,” said Dr. Kari White, lead investigator of the Texas Policy Evaluation Project and associate professor of social work and sociology at The University of Texas at Austin. “Now that Texas and many neighboring states have completely banned abortion, it will be even more difficult for people to obtain timely, comprehensive reproductive healthcare. The obstacles to care may be impossible to overcome for those who already face multiple structural disadvantages.”

The study analyzed data from 18 of 23 Texas clinics and 35 of 42 clinics in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico where Texas residents were most likely to obtain care. Along with Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma have banned abortion care following the June 2022 decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

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The Texas Policy Evaluation Project (TxPEP) is a multidisciplinary group of researchers across the state who evaluate the impact of legislation and policies in Texas related to contraception and abortion. Based at The University of Texas at Austin Population Research Center, we aim to generate and disseminate high-impact research that can inform evidence-based reproductive health policies and services that support more equitable care for all Texans.