Landscape Analysis of Contraceptive Access in Iowa

FAMILY COUNCIL PLANNING OF IOWA | SEPTEMBER 2026

Overview

We conducted a landscape analysis in 2024 of access to contraception across Iowa, with a focus on services for low-income individuals. Our goals were to identify all clinics across the state that provide contraception and accept Medicaid (our proxy for care being available to lower income clients) and to document appointment availability. To assess the role in access that pharmacist provision of contraception might allow, we also sought to identify all pharmacies across the state and to document their business hours. Finally, we conducted a mapping analysis to compare distance and driving times from various cities to the nearest clinic and pharmacy.

Methodology

We developed a list of clinics that we thought might provide contraception & accept Medicaid by combining provider lists of Title X clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), rural health clinics, and branch locations of the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) and UnityPoint hospital systems. We also included the list of family practice and Ob-Gyn nurse practitioners from the state's Medicaid database. We did not seek out lists of private physicians. After merging the lists and removing duplicates, our final list contained 502 clinic locations. We conducted "mystery shopper" calls whereby we telephoned each clinic, posing as a potential client, to inquire about contraceptive services—specifically oral contraceptives (OCs) and IUDs—and Medicaid. We also asked about appointment availability and clinic hours. We received a waiver for this research from Allendale Investigational Review Board (IRB).

We acquired a list from the Iowa Board of Pharmacy of the 579 pharmacies in Iowa that fill standard prescriptions. We conducted internet research to identify the pharmacy hours for each location, calling the pharmacy directly if the hours were not available online.

After the data were collected, we conducted distance and travel time analyses between various cities across the state and the nearest clinic and pharmacy.

Findings

Of the 502 clinic locations that we called, 399 told the caller that an appointment could be scheduled to get a prescription for OCs and that they take Medicaid for payment. Of those 399, 250 (63%) also said that they have at least one clinician who inserts IUDs. When we inquired about appointment availability, 241 sites said they could schedule us within 2 weeks; 168 said within 1 week. Of all the locations, only 28 offer appointments on weekday evenings (at 5:30pm or later) or over the weekend. Family planning appointment frequency varied considerably by site, from multiple days per week to one day per month.

Of the 579 pharmacy locations, 563 have hours beyond the standard 9am-5pm M-F workday. Over half of these pharmacies are connected to large chains such CVS, Hy-Vee, Walgreens, and Walmart.

Combining data from 10 Iowa cities that do not have a local clinic open outside of regular business hours, we found that both travel distance and time to the nearest clinic was substantially and statistically greater than to the nearest pharmacy: median of 45 miles or 50 minutes each way compared to 1 mile or 2 minutes.

While conducting the calls, we identified several issues that could add additional obstacles to accessing care:

- Incorrect or missing information. Over the course of the calls, we spoke with staff who did not know what services their clinics offered and/or what insurance they take, as well as some who provided incorrect information about contraception (for example, that only women who have given birth are eligible for an IUD).
- Multiple locations required the receipt of previous medical records before they would schedule an appointment. Some sites were inflexible on this rule, even when told that the caller wouldn't be able to access records easily or at all.
- As noted above, some clinics have very limited family planning hours; a few only offer this service one day per month. The evening/weekend appointments were sometimes rare as well, only available one evening per week or per month.

Conclusions

- Having contraceptive care nearby does not always mean it is realistically accessible.
- Inaccurate information, medical-record requirements, and limited family planning hours delay care.
- Pharmacist-prescribed contraception is a promising way to expand timely access while preserving clinical standards and patient choice. While pharmacists wouldn't be able to provide methods that require insertion (IUDs and implants), they could prescribe and dispense all others (pill, patch, ring, shot, etc.).

This project was developed by the Family Planning Council of Iowa (FPCI) with the generous support of Arnold Ventures. For questions, please contact Tara Shochet, PhD, MPH, Director of Programs & Grants: tshochet@fpcouncil.com | (515) 288-9028 | 2900 Westown Pkwy, Ste 240, West Des Moines, IA 50266 | www.fpcouncil.org

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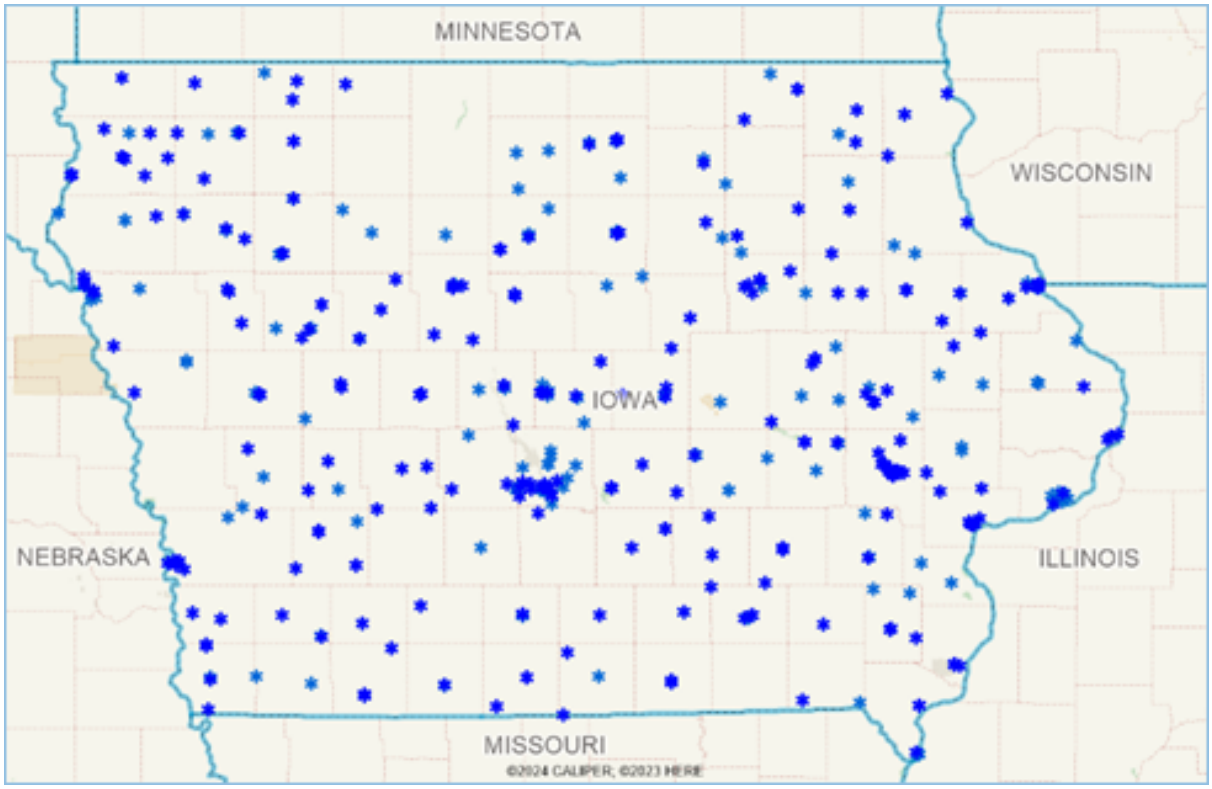
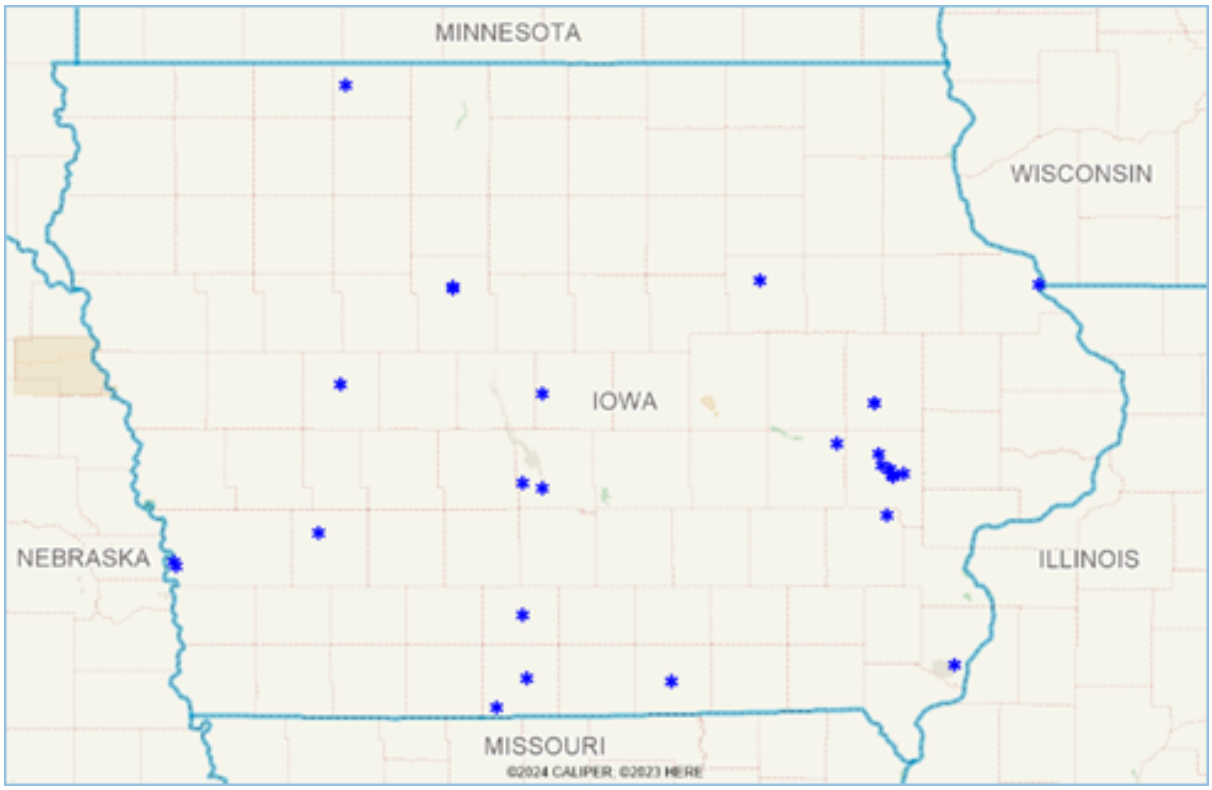
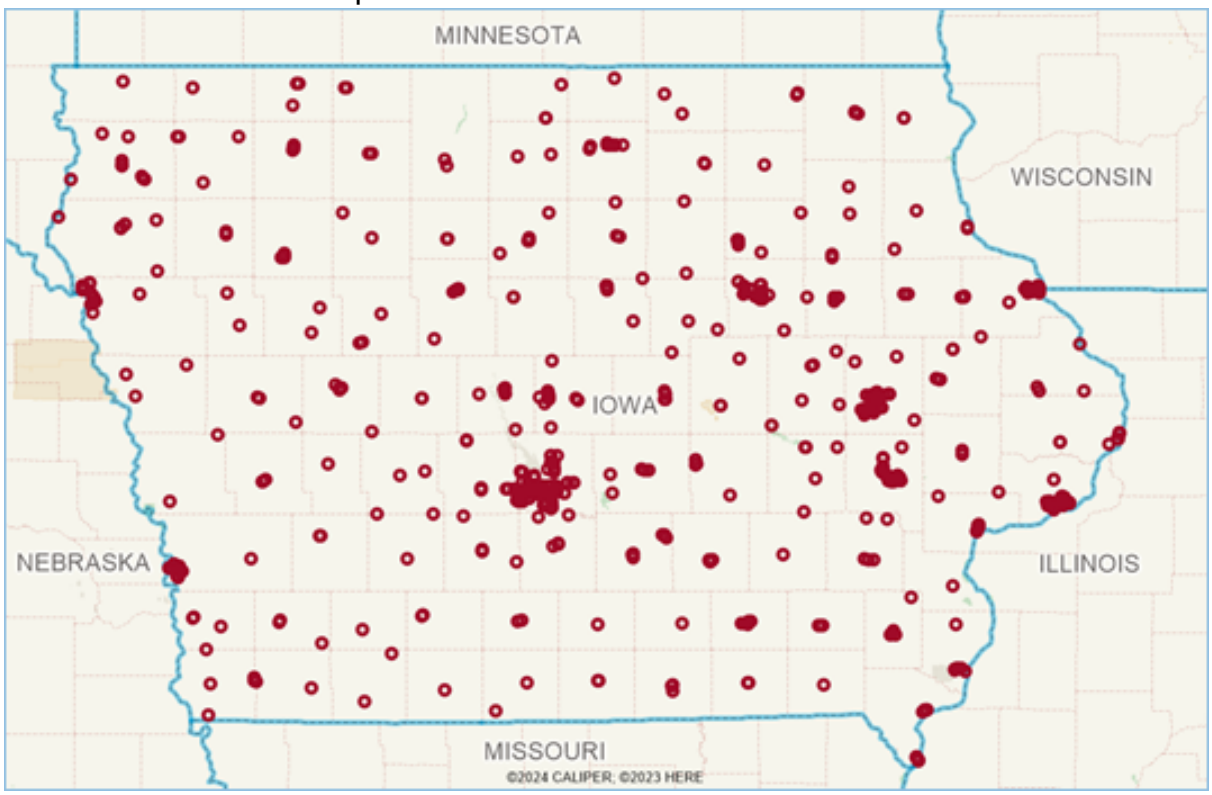
Appendix A: Maps

1. Clinics that provide OC prescriptions and take Medicaid



2. Clinics from map #1 that offer evening or weekend appointments



3. Pharmacies that are open outside of standard business hours