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BACKGROUND

Congenital Syphilis (CS) is caused by a bacteria called *Treponema pallidum* being passed from mother to child during fetal development or at birth.¹ CS is **preventable** through antenatal screening and treatment of an infected pregnant woman.¹ In 2017, there were 918 recorded cases of CS in the U.S., representing a 44% increase since 2016 and a 153% increase since 2013.²

OBJECTIVE: To assess knowledge, attitudes, and factors that influence outcomes and behaviors related to syphilis among high-risk pregnant women and prenatal care providers.

METHODS

SETTING: Kern County, CA and East Baton Rouge Parish, LA.

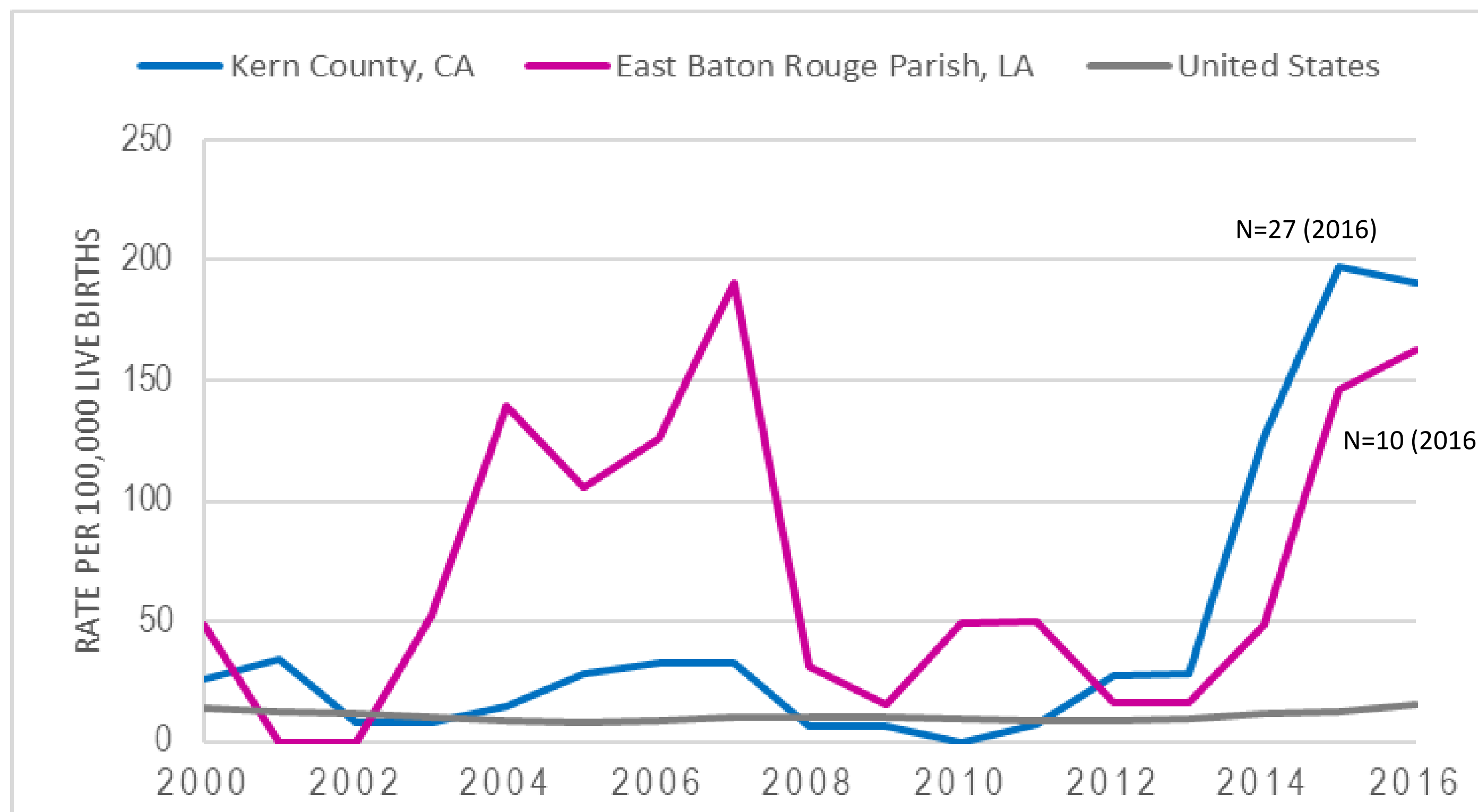


Figure 1. Rates of CS per 100,000 Live Births in Kern County and East Baton Rouge Parish (2000-2016)
 Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NCHHSTP AtlasPlus. Updated 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/atlas/index.htm>. Accessed on March 29, 2019

METHODS: 20 in-depth qualitative interviews (10 per site) with prenatal care providers. 9 focus group discussions with high-risk pregnant women between July 2018 and January 2019. All data were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify emergent themes using QSR NVivo.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research funded by March of Dimes and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U380T000199-05-00). The views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services; nor do they mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

1. Marco De Santis, Carmen De Luca, Ilenia Mappa, et al., "Syphilis Infection during Pregnancy: Fetal Risks and Clinical Management," *Infectious Diseases in Obstetrics and Gynecology*, vol. 2012.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance 2017. Atlanta: U.S.: Department of Health and Human Services; 2018.

RESULTS

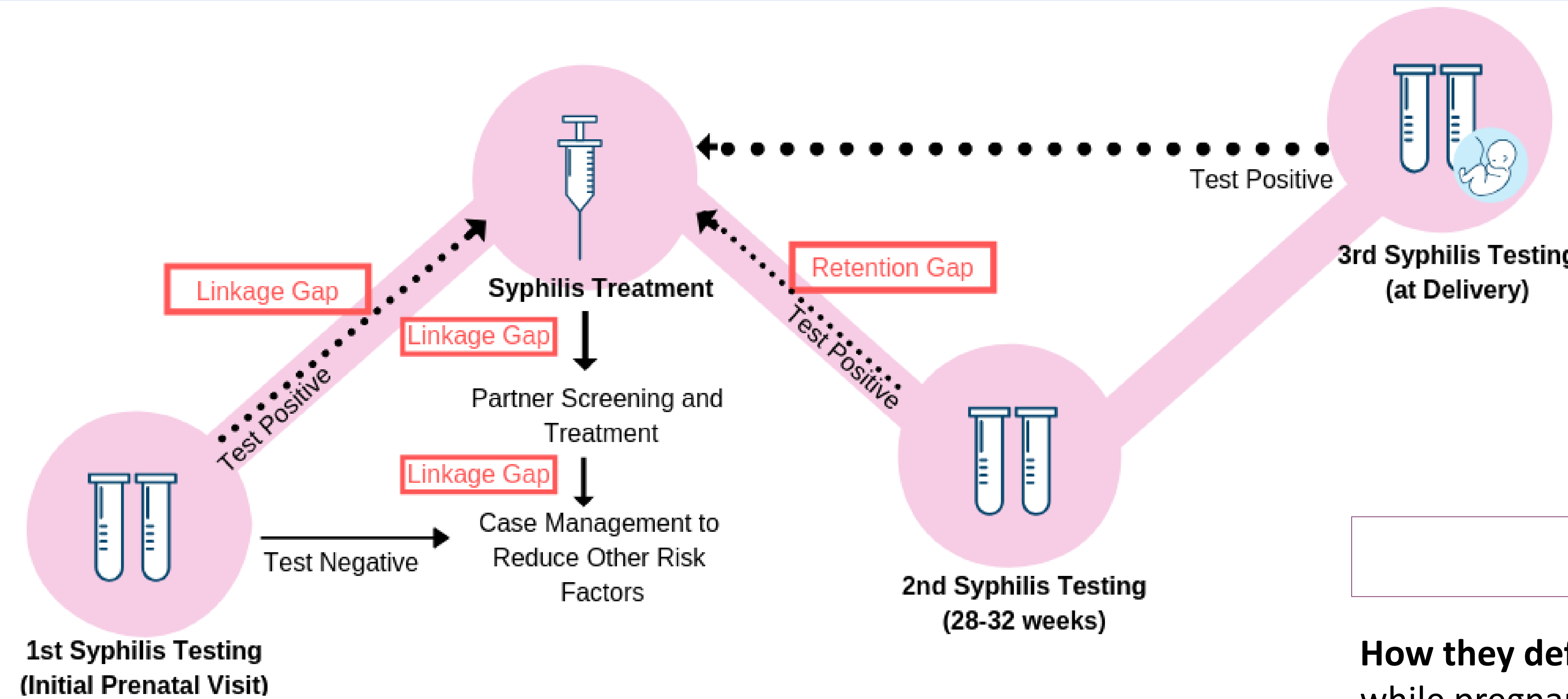


Figure 2. Cascade of Care Model to Identify Gaps in Testing and Treating.

CASCADE OF CARE MODEL: Linkage and Retention Gaps in initial entry to prenatal care, treatment after testing, partner screening/treatment, and case management were identified.
 → High prevalence of syphilis
 → Delay in Prenatal Care Initiation
 → High-Risk Pregnancy Due to Medical, Psychological, Behavioral, and Social Factors

PRENATAL CARE PROVIDERS

How they defined "high-risk pregnancy": Using drugs/alcohol while pregnant; Engaging in transactional/unprotected sex; Having existing health conditions; Being marginally housed/ homeless; Living in area of high syphilis/STI prevalence.

Delayed Initiation of Prenatal Care: Women commonly waited until 2nd and 3rd trimester to (or did not) seek care.

Barriers to Partner Testing: Encouraged partner testing, but could not ensure the testing/treatment.

"I mean we can tell them that their partner needs to be treated but we have almost no way to follow that up or get evidence that it actually happened." – OB/Gyn in EBRP

Limited Communication and Lack of Trust in Medical Care: Mobile phone with no minutes, mistrust in medical provider and/or fearful of being tested positive for drug use.

"Women have fears, like doctors only want to take my baby away, they're only going to get me in trouble, they're only-just going to tell me things I don't want to hear." – OB/Gyn in EBRP

CONCLUSIONS

Congenital syphilis is completely preventable with appropriate prenatal screening and treatment. Evidence-based, setting-specific multilevel interventions should be adapted to address the cascade of barriers to prevention, testing, and treatment of CS in California, Louisiana and other high-risk areas.

HIGH RISK PREGNANT WOMEN

Linkage Gap

Limited Knowledge of the Mother-to-Child Transmission (MTCT): Women in both settings knew of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) but had limited understanding of MTCT of syphilis and its risks.

"They just tested me for it [syphilis]. But, I mean, I have had EDUCATION on syphilis and stuff in the past. But not...what it can do to the baby."
 – FGD participant in East Baton Rouge Parish (EBRP)

Linkage Gap

East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

Insurance-related Barriers: Complicated application process, time for approval, long waitlists, finding providers who accept their insurance.

Linkage Gap

Retention Gap

Kern County, California

Limited Access to Transportation and homelessness: Few women had cars, most lacked money for bus for prenatal appointments.

Substance Use: Substance and alcohol users feared being exposed and involuntarily engaged in law enforcement.

"A lot of girls because are afraid to have their child taken away."
 – FGD participant in Kern County

Information Seeking: Women in both sites commonly accessed health information online or via pregnancy mobile applications due to convenience and language barriers.