

Determinants of Medical Specialty and Practice Location Choice Impact Primary Care and Reproductive Healthcare in Louisiana



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Introduction

- Policy makers recognize disparities across the reproductive and primary healthcare landscape in Louisiana, yet do not fully understand the root causes of these disparities.
- Without this important context, the state cannot devise the action steps needed to address and reduce these disparities.
- In 2023, the number of medical students applying to OB-GYN residency programs declined by 5.2% overall.¹
- Pre-term birth rate in LA increased from 2022-2023 and is significantly higher than the national average (13.4% and 10.4%, respectively). Louisiana is 35th of 40 in rate of maternal morality and 51st of 52 in rate of preterm births.²
- Approximately 78% of Louisiana is designated as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA), indicating a substantial lack of primary care providers across the state.³
- By 2030, Louisiana is projected to have one of the worst physician-to-population ratios in the U.S., with an estimated shortfall of 100 doctors per 100,000 residents.⁴

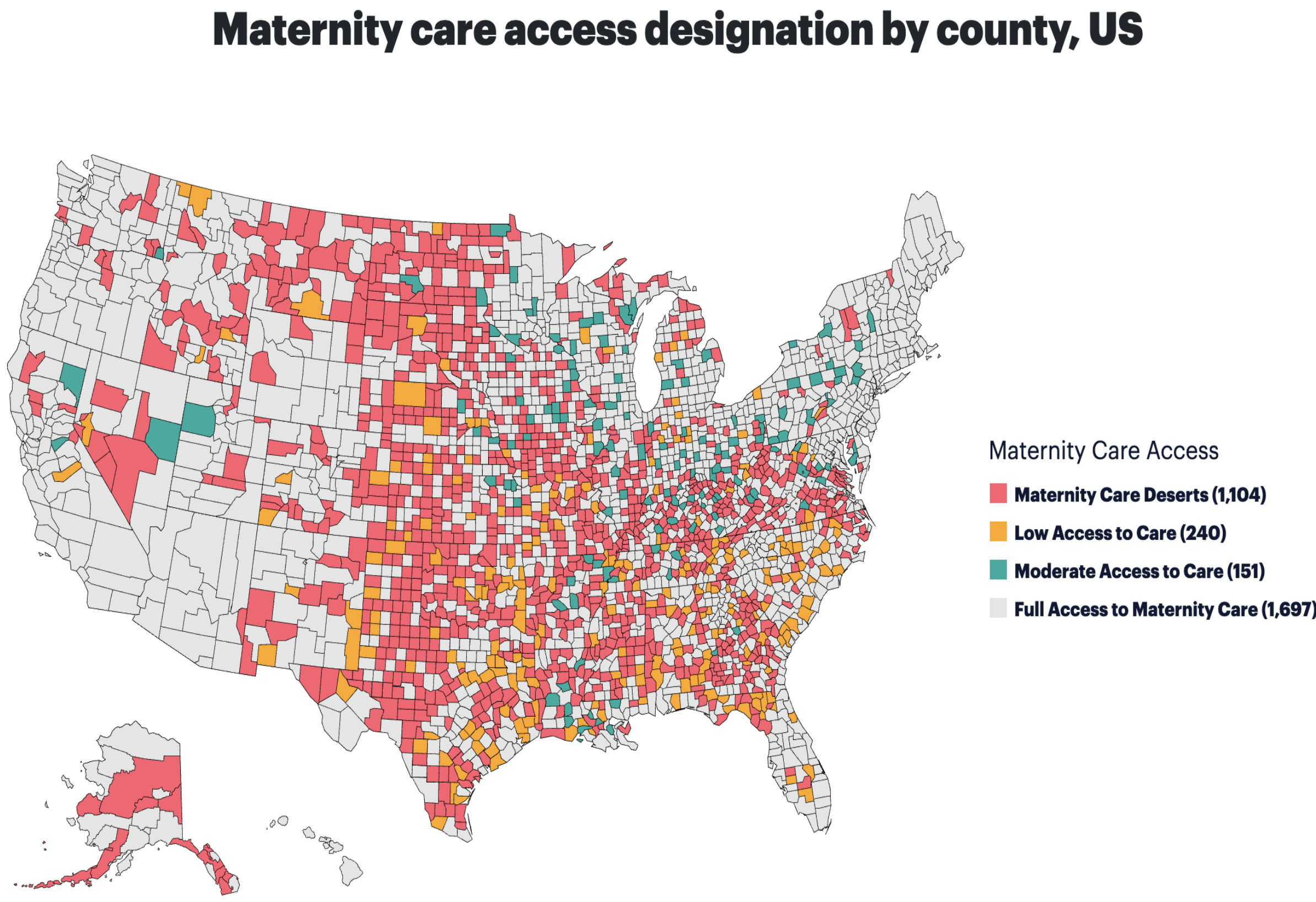


Figure 1: Maternity care access by county in the US. Notably, a significant portion of Louisiana is designated a maternity care desert.²

Research Questions

Reproductive Health

- What are the factors impacting future reproductive care providers' decisions about where to practice medicine and what they want to practice?
- How will this impact/shape future access to reproductive care for Louisiana residents particularly in rural/underserved communities?

Primary Care

- What factors play a role in medical students' decision to choose a primary care specialty?
- How will this impact healthcare in Louisiana, particularly in rural/underserved communities?

Methods

Study Population:

Pilot

- 5 third/fourth year medical students at LSUHSC.
- 25 OBGYN residents at LSUHSC.

Implementation

- 65 third/fourth year medical students at LSUHSC.
- 50 Primary Care & OBGYN residents at Ochsner/LSUHSC.

Study Design:

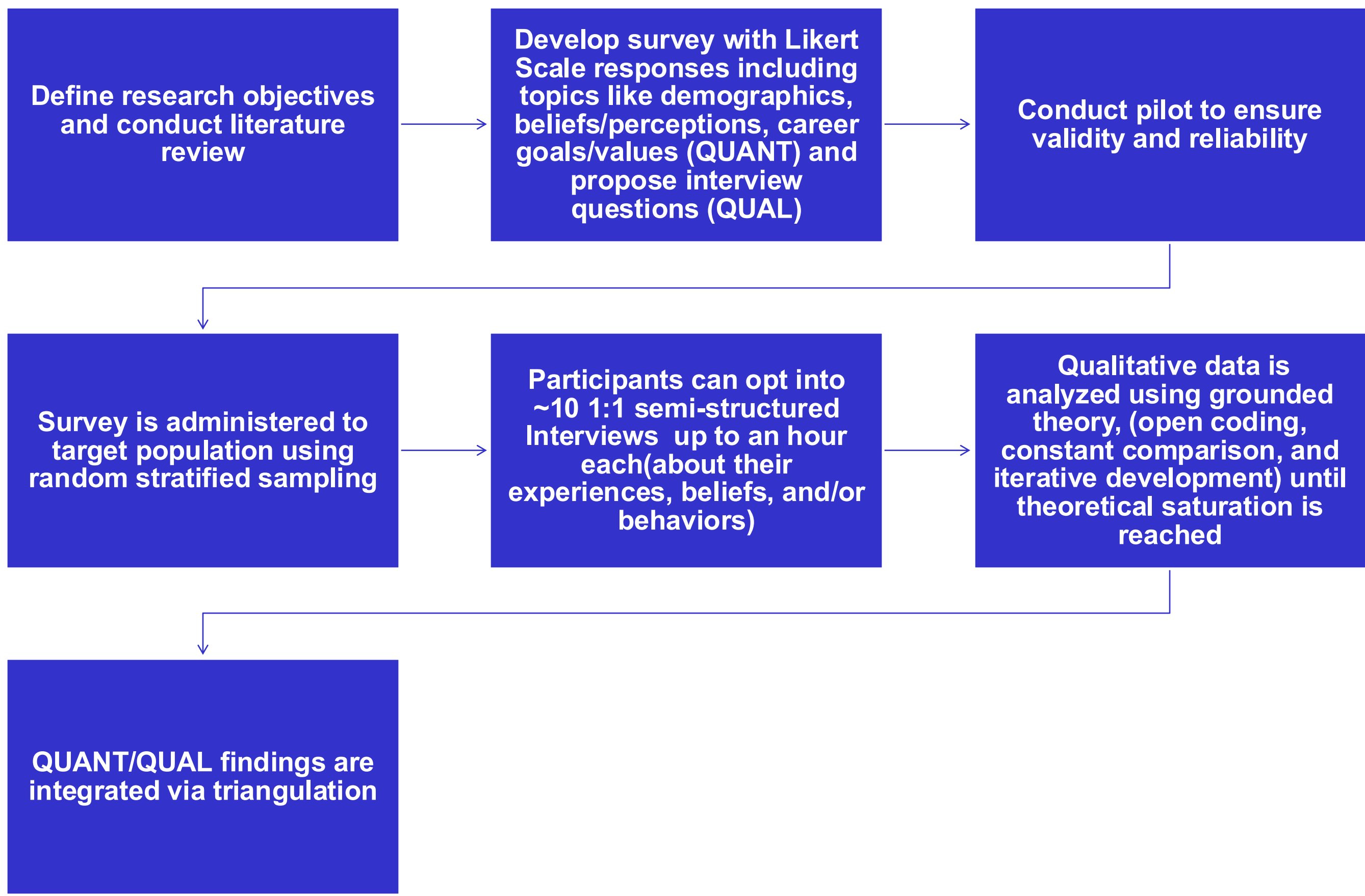


Figure 2: Mixed QUANT/QUAL Study design

Previous Studies

Theme 1: Need for Specialization

“Even though it takes a lot to get into it and it still should be respected widely, a lot of people just kind of think “They’re a dime a dozen,” you know, “There are so many, so it’s not that special, and I need to specialize, so I’m the best and the only one in the world that can do this tiny little thing and get paid a ton for it.”⁸

Theme 2: Lack of Prestige

“I think part of it, too, is just name recognition and prestige within your field. And by specializing...you can really become somebody and be like, “Oh, like, he’s the guy to go to for liver disease.”⁸

Figure 2: Themes Identified in Previous Study Interviewing Undergraduate Students Regarding Primary Care Shortage

Primary Care:

- Clerkship length as an important factor- Higher family medicine match rates correlated with a family medicine clerkship lasting at least 4 weeks.⁵

OBGYN:

- Perceived lack of work-life balance and emotional toll deter some students.⁶
- Importance of gender- female students are more likely to choose obstetrics and gynecology due to factors like personal identification with the patient population and concerns about career barriers due to gender in alternate specialties.⁷

Future Implications

- Medical school curricula and government policy that encourage educational/clinical exposure to reproductive healthcare and primary care can increase the likelihood that graduates will be prepared or willing to provide these services, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- Understanding the root cause of health disparities across Louisiana can assist policy makers in devising the action steps needed to address and reduce these disparities.
- Addressing physician shortages in Louisiana can lower overall healthcare costs and optimize population health outcomes.

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