Surgical sterilization is the most commonly used contraceptive method in the US, yet access to this method is limited for some. In a prospective study of low-income oral contraceptive users in El Paso, Texas, we assessed unmet demand for sterilization among women with at least one child (n=801). Eighteen months after the final interview, we re-contacted 152 women who reported wanting a sterilization and assessed their motivations for and barriers to obtaining the procedure. Among parous women in the prospective study, 64% reported not wanting more children, and the majority (72%) wanted to be sterilized. In the 18 month follow-up interviews, we found that only six women had been able to get a sterilization, and two partners had obtained a vasectomy. Women who were not yet sterilized were still strongly motivated to obtain one, as only four changed their minds. Women stated they wanted a sterilization because they did not want more children and had concerns about health effects of long-term pill use. Among the reasons women reported for not getting a sterilization at their last pregnancy were not signing the Medicaid consent form 30 days before delivery, and the health provider deciding they were ‘too young’. Many were simply told that there was no money for the procedure. Our findings underscore the limited access to a full range of methods for low-income women with public or no insurance. They also show that researchers should not assume a woman’s current method is her method of choice.