



Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Association
Position Statement on Breastfeeding and
WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Initiative
June 2013

Introduction

The Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Association (NLPHA) recognizes that breastfeeding is a key determinant in improving the health outcomes of the people of this province. Breastfeeding is the biological norm for infant and young child feeding because of the nutritional, immunological, social, developmental, physical and psychological benefits for the infant, young child and mother. In addition, breastfeeding offers significant economic and environmental benefits to families, communities and the health care system. Health Canada recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, with the introduction of complementary foods and continued breastfeeding for up to two years of age and beyond (Health Canada, 2012).

There has been a steady increase in breastfeeding rates in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) since the early 2000s. However, compared to the national breastfeeding initiation rate of 87% (Statistics Canada, 2011), NL's initiation rate of 68% remains the lowest in Canada (NL Provincial Perinatal Program (NLPPP), 2013). Worthy of particular mention are the wide regional variations of hospital breastfeeding initiation rates within the province, from a high of 74% to a low of 44%. Research findings consistently show a positive association between breastfeeding and higher socio-economic status, older maternal age and higher education. Anecdotal reports from around the province confirm these findings. In addition, the number of NL children exclusively breastfeeding at six months of age is a cause for concern. Only 14% of our children are receiving the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding to six months of age that helps to ensure an adequate intake of many nutrients, and may include delaying the onset of some chronic diseases and allergies. Low provincial initiation and duration rates and wide regional variations make breastfeeding a public health priority.

The WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) is the primary strategy for the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding in Canada. The BFI is the global standard through which health care services can ensure that their policies and practices are evidence-informed and supportive of breastfeeding women and their families. The Ten Steps for Successful Breastfeeding¹ is the foundation of the Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI). All Baby-Friendly facilities must also adhere to the WHO/UNICEF International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (The Code) and relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions.² The Code seeks to protect breastfeeding by ensuring the ethical marketing of the breastmilk substitute (e.g., formula) industry.

¹ For a list of the Ten Steps for Successful Breastfeeding see The Breastfeeding Committee for Canada BFI Integrated 10 Steps Practice Outcome Indicators for Hospitals and Community Health Services: Summary <http://breastfeedingcanada.ca/BFI.aspx>

² For more detail about The Code see the following link http://www.ibfan.org/issue-international_code.html

There is now considerable evidence from diverse countries around the world that the BFI is associated with increased rates of breastfeeding initiation, exclusivity and duration (Cattaneo & Buzzetti, 2001; Braun et al., 2003; Broadfoot, et al., 2005; Merten et al., 2005; Declercq et al., 2009; Renfrew et al., 2009). In Canada, there are over 50 Baby-Friendly designated hospitals and community health services, the majority in Quebec and Ontario. Both Ontario and Quebec have included specific targets for achieving BFI designation in their provincial public health standards. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and British Columbia have key provincial government directives regarding achieving BFI designation. In NL, all of the regional health authorities are striving to implement BFI policies and practices, and much has been accomplished. However, no regional health authority in this province would be currently eligible for BFI designation.

In October 2006 the NLPHA, with other stakeholders, released a Joint Position Paper, *Breastfeeding: A Public Health Priority*. Following this, in 2007-2008, the provincial government provided annualized financial support for breastfeeding initiatives including the funding of a half-time provincial consultant to provide leadership on breastfeeding. This financial support has enabled the Baby-Friendly Council of NL and its regional health partners to make positive advancements in the promotion and support for breastfeeding (e.g. health professional education, social marketing campaign, provincial website, enhanced public education resources and a strong research agenda). In response to concerns that parents are not receiving accurate information to facilitate an informed decision about breastfeeding, the NLPHA released a position statement on *Informed Decision Making and Infant and Young Child Feeding* (August, 2011), and a background paper that was adapted with permission from the original Ontario Public Health Association (2007) *Informed Decision Making and Infant Feeding Position Paper*. All of these initiatives are noteworthy; however, continued support is needed around promoting and implementing policies and practices that reflect BFI standards, and in the development of interventions to support priority populations with lower rates of breastfeeding.

Beliefs/Principles

The NLPHA believes it is important to create an environment within our health care system that protects, promotes and supports breastfeeding as the norm for infant and young child feeding.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Association recommends the following priority actions to improve breastfeeding outcomes:

- Provision of ongoing and enhanced human and financial resources to promote and support the implementation of the WHO/UNICEF BFI in regional health authorities in NL.
- Promote adherence to the WHO/UNICEF International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, and all relevant World Health Assembly resolutions.
- Monitor and report on regional health authority progress in implementing the BFI Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding.
- Develop and implement targeted interventions to support the needs of groups with low uptake of breastfeeding.

Conclusion

The NLPHA recognizes that breastfeeding is a key determinant in improving the health outcomes of the people of NL. The WHO/UNICEF BFI is the primary strategy for the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding in Canada. When health care agencies implement BFI policies and practices, breastfeeding outcomes improve. The NLPHA recognizes that there has been some increase in

breastfeeding initiation rates in recent years and makes recommendations for future improvements, including key stakeholder promotion and resources for the implementation of policies and practices that reflect the BFI province wide. The aim is for NL to have the best breastfeeding rates in Canada.

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