



Problem:

Experts recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. *Why?* Because breastfeeding helps mothers and babies stay healthy. For infants, this means fewer ear, respiratory and gastrointestinal infections, and a lower risk of asthma, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and several chronic diseases that extend beyond childhood. For mothers, this means a faster return to pre-pregnancy weight and lower chance of postpartum bleeding, breast and ovarian cancers, and postpartum depression. Although most mothers intend to breastfeed, 60% do **not** reach their breastfeeding goals. In New York State (NYS), 88% of mothers start off breastfeeding, but nearly half (48%) of breastfed newborns receive formula supplementation by the time they leave the hospital. Most healthy, breastfed newborns have no medical need to receive formula supplementation and this introduction can threaten breastfeeding success. In the months following hospital discharge, breastfeeding rates continue to drop off, especially for exclusive breastfeeding. Many factors contribute to this, including inadequate professional support from health care providers and insufficient social support from family members, places of employment, and the community. New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) responded by identifying breastfeeding promotion, support and protection as a key strategy for preventing chronic disease. NYSDOH worked with state and local partners to implement evidence-based strategies within NYS hospitals, health care practices, worksites and community organizations.

Intervention:

Support for breastfeeding is grounded in NYS's Prevention Agenda, the state's health improvement plan, and its blueprint for helping to make NYS the healthiest state in the nation. Over the last five years, NYSDOH leveraged both state and federal funding to implement a variety of comprehensive policy, systems and environmental change programs and to establish two NYSDOH designation programs, the *NYSDOH Breastfeeding Friendly Practice Designation* and the *NYSDOH Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care Designation*, which recognize health care practices and child care sites that have excelled in their efforts to implement a set of breastfeeding policies and practice standards.

For hospitals, NYSDOH partnered with the National Institute for Children's Health Quality (NICHQ) from 2013-2017 to recruit and engage hospitals in the Breastfeeding Quality Improvement in Hospitals (BQIH) project, a quality improvement initiative aimed at improving hospital practices, increasing breastfeeding rates and reducing ethnic and racial disparities. Concurrently, many policy changes have been instituted to support improvements in hospitals. Most notably, in 2017, the NYS perinatal regulations for hospitals were updated to better align with the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding. All 124 birthing hospitals in NYS were required to submit policies that comply with the updated regulations.

For practices, worksites and community organizations, a total of 20 local grantees received funding to increase breastfeeding supportive policies and practices; five grantees targeted worksites through the Creating Healthy Places to Live, Work and Play grant (2010-2015), nine grantees targeted health care practices through the Obesity Prevention in Pediatric Health Care Settings grant (2011-2016) and six grantees are currently targeting health care practices, child care settings, worksites and community organizations through the Creating Breastfeeding Friendly Communities grant (2017-current). The commonality across these grant initiatives was the emphasis on recruiting and engaging sites and providing on-going training, technical assistance and resources to help make the desired policy, system and environmental changes.

All this work was complemented by on-going collaboration with partners through the NYSDOH Breastfeeding Leadership Team. Team members are both internal and external stakeholders representing both state- and local-level organizations concerned with the promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding for New York's women, infants and families. The team provides ongoing insight and expert advice to inform current and future breastfeeding initiatives in NYS.



26
Baby
Friendly
Hospitals



51
Breastfeeding
Friendly
Practices



34
Worksites
with
Policies



21
Licensed
Baby
Cafés

Impact:

Over the last five years, 32 hospitals, 127 health care practices, 174 worksites and 13 community organizations have participated in NYSDOH-led projects to improve breastfeeding policies and practices, and to build a continuum of care for mothers, infants and families.

For participating hospitals, program data showed a 57% improvement in teaching mothers to recognize hunger cues, so now more babies are fed on demand. One cohort of hospitals increased rooming-in rates by 33%, so now more moms and babies are kept together at least 23 hours of the day. Overall, hospitals demonstrated a 10% improvement in exclusive breastfeeding rates, so more infants are receiving only breast milk during their first two days of life. These efforts have contributed to the **26 hospitals that have earned the Baby Friendly designation** by Baby Friendly USA, Inc. Women who deliver at these hospitals receive comprehensive support in breastfeeding during the birth hospitalization as well as evidence-based care and education that is free from commercial interests.

For participating health care practices, local contractors used a pre/post assessment tool with targeted sites. Over the course of the project, staff training for breastfeeding increased from 0% to 38% and breastfeeding assistance for new mothers increased from 31% to 62%. These NYSDOH-led projects also contributed to the **51 health care practices that have been designated as Breastfeeding Friendly** by NYSDOH. Patients at these practices receive comprehensive professional breastfeeding counseling and assistance during prenatal and postpartum office visits.

In community settings, **34 worksites have developed or updated a written breastfeeding policy** and 8 community organizations in high need areas of NYS applied for licensure from Baby Café USA. There is now a total of **21 licensed Baby Cafés in NYS**, where mothers can receive both professional and peer breastfeeding support.

NYSDOH uses multiple statewide surveillance systems to monitor breastfeeding indicators, including NYS Birth Certificate data (Vital Records) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Immunization Survey (NIS). During the years the NYSDOH-led projects were implemented:

- **Breastfeeding initiation rates in NYS maternity hospitals increased from 85% in 2013 to 88% in 2015 (Vital Records).**
- **The percentage of infants exclusively breastfed in the hospital also increased over the same time period, from 42% to 45% (Vital Records).**
- **The percentage of infants breastfed at six months increased from 53% to 60% (NIS).**
- **The percentage of infants exclusively breastfed at 6 months increased from 17% to 23% (NIS).**

Although these increases in breastfeeding exclusivity and duration rates are promising, NYS's performance remains below national goals. Continuing to support a continuum of care for mothers to receive breastfeeding encouragement and support in NYS has the potential to impact breastfeeding rates, both for exclusive breastfeeding and breastfeeding duration. This, in turn, will improve maternal and child health and decrease the prevalence of chronic disease in NYS.