

Changing the Face of Breastfeeding

In Western Newfoundland, we are working to create environments that women feel comfortable to breastfeed wherever and whenever their baby needs to be fed. Infant feeding is one of the most important decisions that new families make. Support from all members of the community is a key factor influencing a mother's decision to breastfeed and how long she will continue breastfeeding.

Our most recent provincial statistics from 2013 report that the number of women who start breastfeeding is steadily increasing at 64.2%, but we still have work to do to meet the provincial rate of 69.6% and the national rate is much higher at 90.4%. The majority of women in Newfoundland and Labrador want to breastfeed their babies but may be met with barriers that keep them from achieving breastfeeding success. Businesses, organizations and municipalities that support breastfeeding families play a vital role in helping to create a breastfeeding friendly community.

In our environment it is not always easy to breastfeed your baby comfortably. In the past many women have been asked not to breastfeed in establishments and public areas. The Baby-Friendly council of NL is working hard to change that! The Baby-Friendly council has a website and a Facebook page. The Council listened to the breastfeeding mothers who expressed through social media that they really needed businesses to be more supportive of breastfeeding in their establishments. A toolkit titled "Make Breastfeeding Your Business Newfoundland and Labrador" has been developed to assist businesses and organizations to become breastfeeding friendly. You will be seeing many businesses organizations and municipalities displaying a new decal in their windows and doors to welcome breastfeeding mothers!

In Western Newfoundland, more than 50 toolkits have been distributed so far to volunteer mothers in communities from Port Saunders to Port aux Basques and they will be approaching all types of organizations: restaurants, department stores, coffee shops, financial institutions, libraries, town/city halls, craft stores, jewelry stores, electronic stores and mini malls.

Corner Brook Transit is displaying a new sign for the next two months and there will be 15 breastfeeding signs throughout the region to encourage women to breastfeed wherever and whenever baby needs. This is happening thanks to the funding made available through the Baby-Friendly Council. With all of these efforts to support cultural change it is hoped that there will be an increase in women choosing to breastfeed and being comfortable enough to continue to exclusively breastfeed to 6 months and then continue for two years or more, as the World Health Organization recommends. Breastfed babies have fewer doctor visits, hospitalizations and prescriptions which lowers the overall health care costs. Not breastfeeding increases the child's risk of asthma, respiratory infections, ear infections, obesity, and diabetes. Not breastfeeding also increases the mother's risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, osteoporosis, and heart disease.

Employers are being encouraged to inform staff members that breastfeeding is a protected human right and women in Newfoundland and Labrador have a right to breastfeed anytime and anywhere. Support can be provided through positive attitudes, encouragement and day-to-day help. Everyone has a role to play in changing the environment to support breastfeeding!

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