

CALL TO ACTION STEP 3: INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT BREASTFEEDING



THE BABY
FRIENDLY
INITIATIVE



unicef
UNITED KINGDOM



UNICEF UK'S CALL TO ACTION

In 2016 Unicef UK launched a Call to Action, urging all UK Governments to take steps to improve breastfeeding rates by:

1. Developing a **National Infant Feeding Strategy Board**, tasked with creating a strategy and plan to deliver the goal of ensuring more babies are breastfed
2. Including actions to **promote, protect and support breastfeeding in all policy areas** where breastfeeding has an impact
3. Implementing **evidence-based initiatives that support breastfeeding**,

including the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative

4. Protecting the public from harmful commercial interests by **adopting, in full, the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes** and subsequent resolutions ("the Code").

This paper explains **Step 3**: the importance of implementing evidence-based initiatives that support breastfeeding, both in healthcare settings and in the wider community.

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CAMPAIGN**

The UK has one of the most entrenched bottle feeding cultures in the world, and despite overwhelming evidence that breastfeeding saves lives, improves health and cuts costs, there continues to be a general belief that formula milk is almost as good as breastmilk. In addition, breastfeeding is a highly emotive issue as so many parents do not breastfeed or try very hard to breastfeed without success. Concerted and co-ordinated action at national, local and societal level is required to change the environment in the UK and enable mothers to breastfeed; in health services, in the community and in the home. Only then will we return to a society where

breastfeeding is seen as the normal way to feed our babies.

Evidence indicates that the biggest improvements in breastfeeding rates come when a multi-faceted approach is taken that considers the parents' whole journey from pregnancy to new parenthood. Sensitive conversations during pregnancy, skilled support in the immediate post-birth period, ongoing guidance and social support are all needed to enable mothers to feel confident and breastfeed successfully for as long as they wish. In addition, the wider community needs to welcome and support breastfeeding,

including in public spaces, in the workplace and through the media.

Within the healthcare setting, The Baby Friendly Initiative is improving practice to support breastfeeding, but maintaining these positive results requires continued resourcing as well as interventions beyond the healthcare context. An evidence-based, global programme of Unicef and the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Baby Friendly Initiative is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and cited in numerous national policy and guidance documents. The programme has been highly successful, with over 90% of maternity units and 80% of health visiting services actively engaged, and as a consequence breastfeeding initiation rates have improved by over 20%.

However, breastfeeding continuation rates remain worryingly low. Whilst it is highly commendable and reassuring that the UK healthcare system has made such progress with implementing the Baby Friendly standards, recent staff shortages in maternity services, cuts to health visiting services and de-commissioning of voluntary sector support undermine this success.

We know from the extensive evidence base that women need face-to-face, predictable, on-going support to continue to be successful at breastfeeding, but this strain on resources means that the quantity and quality of care has

been compromised. In addition, enabling longer-term breastfeeding requires support at a political level in conjunction with community-based interventions such as mother support groups.

The Baby Friendly standards have helped to improve breastfeeding initiation rates and provided a strong foundation on which further initiatives can be developed. In order that we do not lose all the progress that has been made, and to ensure that we continue to improve breastfeeding rates, Unicef UK is calling on the UK governments to maintain and improve support for health services to continue to implement the Baby Friendly standards and to make them sustainable over time.



In addition, we are calling on the UK governments to implement a collective suite of evidence-based initiatives within and beyond the healthcare context, to support the

UK to regain its breastfeeding culture. Areas requiring urgent attention include social support for breastfeeding mothers, public health campaigns to raise awareness, employer schemes to support mothers returning to work and breastfeeding welcome schemes to enable mothers to feel confident to breastfeed when not at home. Only when a holistic approach is taken, with community interventions complementing healthcare initiatives, will breastfeeding rates see consistent and sustainable improvement.

Breastfeeding practices are highly responsive to interventions delivered in health systems, communities, and homes. The largest effects are achieved when interventions are delivered in combination.

Lancet Breastfeeding series, 2016

IT'S TIME TO CHANGE THE CONVERSATION ADD YOUR VOICE TO THE CAMPAIGN

To read the Call to Action, references and all four papers, visit unicef.uk/bficaltoaction