

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health
Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer

DATE: 2022 October 20

Baby-Friendly Initiative Update

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 58-22, re: “Baby-Friendly Initiative Update,” for information.

Key Points

- The Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) is a global evidence-based strategy that promotes, protects, and supports the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding.
- The Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) was formally designated as Baby-Friendly in November 2015. At that time, all Ontario Health Units were required to work towards achievement of Baby-Friendly designation; however, BFI is no longer an accountability indicator. MLHU was due to begin the re-designation process in fall 2020, but currently does not plan to seek re-designation.
- MLHU is committed to maintaining the infant feeding best practices that are at the core of the Baby-Friendly Initiative, and the revised Baby-Friendly Policy supports the implementation of these infant feeding best practices. The policy is reviewed annually.

Background

Breastfeeding improves the health and development of infants and children, and provides health, social, and economic advantages to women, families, and society in general. Current recommendations from the World Health Organization advise exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, with continued breastfeeding up to two years and beyond. The Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) is a global evidence-based strategy that promotes, protects, and supports the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding.

Previously, the Ministry of Health (MOH) selected Baby-Friendly designation as an Accountability Agreement Performance Indicator for all public health units in Ontario. The MLHU began the implementation process in November 2011 and followed clearly defined steps laid out by both the Ministry and the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada (BCC), which is the national designation authority. Over the course of four years, the Health Unit worked through the implementation and designation process. In November 2015, the Health Unit was formally designated a Baby-Friendly organization. This designation was in place for five years and in 2020 MLHU was required to begin the re-designation process. A decision was made at that time to not seek re-designation due to various factors, including the removal of BFI as an accountability indicator and competing public health priorities.

Current Situational Update

As part of the Healthy Start restructuring post-pandemic, there has been a commitment to ensure ongoing support to maintaining Baby-Friendly best practices within the organization. Additionally, there is a focus on providing outreach to community healthcare providers to support education and skill building around Baby-Friendly best practices, as outlined in the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (Breastfeeding Committee of Canada).

After a period of planning, progress has been made towards the following activities:

- Launching a Baby-Friendly Best Practices Committee within the Healthy Start Division to act as advisory, liaison, and workgroup to support infant feeding best practices within MLHU.
- Revising the Baby-Friendly Policy to align with the updated BFI Implementation Guideline document (Breastfeeding Committee for Canada, 2021), which includes the Ten Steps. There are also plans to review related organizational policies and Healthy Start Division Guidelines.
- Promoting Canadian Breastfeeding Week awareness activities from October 1 – 7 internally and externally, including promotion of key messages through social media, website, and newsletter articles.
- Implementing the *Baby-Friendly 20-Hour Course Practice Workshops for Healthcare Providers*. These workshops supplement a provincial breastfeeding e-learning course and consist of a full day, hands-on, interactive learning session focused on Baby-Friendly best practices. Along with Healthy Start Division Public Health Nurses (PHNs), there is currently a strong collaboration with both London Health Science Centre (LHSC) and Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital to ensure newer prenatal/postpartum nurses at each of these organizations attend one of the workshops being offered this fall. At the current time, three workshops are scheduled for October and November, with plans to offer them ongoing into 2023 with a broader reach to community healthcare professionals.
- Continuing maintenance of the Middlesex-London Infant Feeding Surveillance System which collects survey data from consenting participants on infant feeding practices within the region. The goal is to analyze infant feeding practice indicators to inform programming within the Division.

Next Steps

As a period of post-pandemic recovery continues, there is a need to focus efforts in two areas with regards to baby-friendly strategies. The first would be to focus inwards as an organization, working to review and align MLHU's policies and practices with the updated Baby-Friendly Guidelines and best practices, and renew internal knowledge about how and why we support breastfeeding as a public health priority. The second area would be ensuring the local community has a consistent, evidence-informed approach to infant feeding, with a focus on breastfeeding best practices. This can be accomplished through enhanced collaboration and education that builds healthcare provider capacity to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding.

This report was submitted by the Healthy Start Division.



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