

Building partnerships to improve workplace accommodations for breastfeeding moms

Since 2016, the NH Occupational Health Surveillance Program (OHSP) has partnered with the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the NH Breastfeeding Taskforce to collect data on barriers to continue breastfeeding after childbirth among women participating in the NH Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), particularly focusing on workplace accommodation policies and support practices that encourage or discourage breastfeeding after returning to work.

The Challenge

Breastfeeding prevalence among low-income women, specifically women enrolled in the WIC program, continues to be below national targets established in Healthy People 2020. Many women enrolled in WIC programs are working either full time or part time. A WIC eligible woman is likely to have a low-income job in childcare, home healthcare, or in one of the service industries. The lack of workplace lactation policies and accommodations in these industries may influence a woman's choice to continue breastfeeding once she has returned to work.

The Response

The NH OHSP, DHHS WIC Nutrition Program, and Breastfeeding Taskforce, developed a survey for distribution to the four NH WIC local agencies. WIC agency staff distributed the survey to women during their certification and follow up visits. The survey focused on workplace breastfeeding policies, private space to express milk at work and support practices as well as the occupation and industry of the respondent.

Survey results revealed that women employed full time and women who were unemployed but looking for work were least likely to be breastfeeding. "I went back to work" was most often reported by women working in the *Accommodation Food and Hospitality* industry group as the reason they stopped breastfeeding. The majority of women reported they do not have a private place available to pump at work and are not aware of a workplace lactation policy at their place of employment.

The Impact

Results of the survey were used by NH DHHS and the Breastfeeding Taskforce to inform an ASTHO funded initiative to develop a workplace lactation toolkit for businesses that are planning to implement lactation policies, space and education in support of their breastfeeding employees. Specifically, the results provided a better understanding of the industries where efforts could be made to increase support for breastfeeding women. Finally, the results will inform future outreach campaigns and legislative efforts to expand protections for breastfeeding employees in the workplace.



For the full report, visit

<https://iod.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/NHOHSP/Pubs/breastfeeding.pdf>