

Joint Statement in Celebration of World Health Day

7 April 2019



World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action



Universal Health Coverage

[La Leche League International \(LLLI\)](#) and the [World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action \(WABA\)](#) celebrate [World Health Day 2019](#) by focusing on universal health coverage (UHC) in the context of breastfeeding. UHC is fundamental to “ensuring all people and communities have access to quality health services where and when they need them” (1) including services that support breastfeeding. Linking actors within primary healthcare systems and the community creates a [warm chain of support for breastfeeding](#) and lays the foundation for universal health coverage for all. [Breastfeeding is a team effort](#), and we need to [empower mothers, fathers, partners, families, workplaces and communities](#) to enable breastfeeding.

National and local healthcare systems providing strong primary healthcare can help families attain their breastfeeding goals. It is critical that everyone involved in the healthcare system has sufficient knowledge and communication skills to be able to assist families in meeting their goals.

[Breastfeeding is the foundation of life](#). Human milk provides the basic building blocks for optimal growth and development of the child. It contains the right amount of nutrients for growth, is easily digested, and is readily available. Colostrum or first milk is concentrated nutrition for the newborn that contains vital antibodies to defend the baby’s immature immune system against many harmful agents. Mature human milk replaces colostrum to continue meeting the growing needs of the child, providing the needed fats, proteins, carbohydrates, and calories to support optimal growth. (2)



Breastfeeding is also associated with a reduced risk of overweight/obesity and may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. Not only do babies thrive on human milk, but it also has lifelong benefits. Infant formula does not provide antibodies or immune system protection. Not breastfeeding increases the risk of many illnesses, such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, and other infections. (5, 6) The healthcare system plays an important part in helping families meet their breastfeeding goals, and regardless of the length of the breastfeeding journey, breastfeeding has benefits for the baby. A strong primary healthcare system that supports breastfeeding from birth provides the optimal health start with lifelong health benefits for the infant. (2, 3, 4, 7)

There are also maternal health benefits of breastfeeding, such as lowering the risk of breast and ovarian cancers, reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and protecting against autoimmune diseases. (4, 8, 9, 10, 11) Breastfeeding may also help to increase the spacing of pregnancies if done in accordance with the WHO and UNICEF recommendations. (9)

WHO and UNICEF recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months of the child’s life with the addition of complementary solid foods at six months and continued breastfeeding for

two years or longer to promote the best lifelong health outcomes for the child. (12) Yet, many families lack equitable access to healthcare due to policies or systems, and adequate support for breastfeeding. (13) Hence, ensuring this access to all families is critical.

WABA's [Warm Chain of Support](#) for Breastfeeding campaign places the breastfeeding dyad at the core of a continuum of care during the first 1000 days of the baby's life. (14) With consistent messages and proper referral systems throughout the warm chain, the mother-baby dyad will benefit from ongoing support and skilled assistance. All mothers are then [empowered](#) with a more satisfying and effective breastfeeding experience.



Through supportive breastfeeding policies and consistent messages, Baby-friendly hospitals can positively impact the antenatal period and early minutes, hours and days after birth. (15) Additionally, Step 10 of the [Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding](#) reinforces the importance



of follow-up for the breastfeeding dyad following their discharge from the maternity care facility. In a system that supports breastfeeding as a foundation for lifelong health, this follow-up may be a breastfeeding support group, a community clinic, or a health provider's practice. It is necessary for the maternity care facility to ensure that when the breastfeeding dyad leaves the hospital they have a knowledgeable source of support. [LLL](#) and other peer breastfeeding support organisations offer this support for families and the community. (16)

Breastfeeding benefits babies, mothers and nations. WHO highlights the need for primary healthcare throughout the life cycle. Breastfeeding, with its lifelong positive health effects, requires a warm chain of support that spans primary healthcare and beyond. To empower parents and enable breastfeeding, universal health coverage must be available and accessible for all.

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[#WarmChain](#) [#WBW2019](#) [#breastfeeding](#) [#UHC](#) [#EBF6](#)

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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are international Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLLl), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). WABA is incorporated in Malaysia as World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action Bhd (847762-P), a non-profit company limited by guarantee.



La Leche League International (LLLl) is a non-profit organisation founded in 1956 by seven women who wanted to help other mothers breastfeed their babies. LLLl, the world's largest resource for breastfeeding and related information, offers encouragement worldwide through mother-to-mother support and breastfeeding mother support groups in 70 countries. • Address: 110 Horizon Drive, Suite 210, Raleigh, NC 27615, USA • Tel: 1+800-LALECHE (525-3243) • Fax: 1+919-459-2075 • Website: www.llli.org

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