Breastfeeding Holds the Promise of Health for All Babies

- Breastfeeding is a crucial first step in protecting the health of mothers and infants; the nutritional, immunological, and biological components in human milk nourish infants and build a foundation for lifelong health advantages.¹
- Hospital policies have an enormous impact on infant-feeding success.²⁻⁴ Although breastfeeding is a natural process, a mother’s experience in the hospital has a powerful influence on her ability to follow through with her decision to breastfeed her baby.
- Hospitals that have instituted Baby-Friendly practices have high rates of breastfeeding, no matter where they are located or what populations they serve.⁵⁻⁶ These evidence-based reforms must reach hospitals serving the state’s poorest families.

Practices that Support Breastfeeding are Essential to Quality Health Care

- The Joint Commission and state and federal agencies are monitoring breastfeeding rates and perinatal medical practices in California hospitals; outdated institutional policies that create disparities in health care are no longer acceptable.
- Collaboration has been shown to improve breastfeeding support and care.⁷ Working together, common barriers can be addressed by sharing information, pooling resources, and implementing quality improvement procedures.
- Hospital breastfeeding support aligns with the preventative and cost savings strategies of Health Care Reform. (www.hhs.gov/healthcare/facts/timeline/index.html)
Barriers to Policy Improvement Can Be Overcome

- Recent state and federal policy benchmarks confirm growing public expectation that hospital environments should fully support breastfeeding.
- The number of Baby-Friendly hospitals in California continues to increase, from only 12 in 2006 to 59 in August 2013, yet this designation has been achieved by only a fraction of the birthing hospitals in the state. More work is needed to ensure that all hospitals are providing the best possible care to mothers and babies.
- The foundation of best practice is spelled out in 10 well-defined evidence-based “steps” (www.babyfriendlyusa.org) which have been shown to reduce barriers to exclusive breastfeeding.

Baby-Friendly hospitals have high breastfeeding rates no matter what populations they serve.

- The Joint Commission, an organization that accredits and certifies hospitals, adopted 5 Perinatal Care Core Measures in 2010. This set of objectives includes rates of exclusive breastfeeding, as well as elective deliveries and cesarean sections, which may affect in-hospital breastfeeding rates (www.jointcommission.org/perinatal_care/).
- Hospital policies that do not directly support exclusive breastfeeding are not only outdated, but fail to reflect what is now considered standard, high-quality care.

Alameda County Breastfeeding and Hospital Performance

- County average breastfeeding rates:
  - Any – 96.4%
  - Exclusive – 80.9%
- Ranked 14th in the state for exclusive breastfeeding
- One hospital among the 15 highest-scoring in the state: Kaiser Oakland
- Two Baby-Friendly hospitals: ACMC-Highland Hospital, Kaiser Hayward