**Breastfeeding Disparities in Low Income and Women of Color**

Healthy People 2020 Initiative of the U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion objectives include increasing the proportion of infants who are ever breastfed to 81.9%. And Healthy People 2020, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the World Health Organization recommend infants be exclusively breastfed for about the first 6 months of life. Unfortunately, in California, we are not achieving these breastfeeding goals for all women, particularly among low-income and women of color.

* More than 94% of women in California start breastfeeding in the hospital, but less than 70% them leave the hospital exclusively breastfeeding their infants.
* Among WIC participants – who account for 58% of all births in California - fewer than 25% are breastfeeding exclusively at two months after birth, and fewer than 15% do so at four months after birth.

**California breastfeeding rates differ widely by ethnicity:**

* The highest exclusive breastfeeding rates are seen among white mothers.
* More than 90% of Latina mothers initiate breastfeeding, but only 65% breastfeed exclusively while in the hospital.
* The lowest rates of exclusive breastfeeding are seen among African American mothers with 20% fewer exclusively breastfeeding in the hospital than white mothers.

**For low-income women, many barriers to breastfeeding exist:**

* Low reimbursement rates for Medi-Cal breast pumps means many low-income mothers do not have access to quality breast pumps. Without access to quality breast pumps, mothers can be discouraged and frustrated and stop breastfeeding all together.
* Despite the fact studies have shown that breastfeeding support immediately after birth is key to increasing breastfeeding rates, outpatient post-partum breastfeeding support is mostly provided by WIC, not through health plan benefits.
* The lack of consistent reimbursement for outpatient breastfeeding support means that even fewer lower-income mothers have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate help after they leave the hospital.
* Many mothers in low-wage positions cannot afford to take extended unpaid maternity leave and may not have access to flexible schedules, lactation accommodation, and other benefits that support them in breastfeeding.

*http://www.calwic.org/project/sustaining-change-in-challenging-times-california-needs-innovative-breastfeeding-strategies/*

*http://www.calwic.org/storage/documents/WIC\_BFF\_AA\_Analysis\_R8.pdf*

*http://www.calwic.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Impacts-of-Breastfeeding-Support\_CWA-05-30-2017.pdf*

By increasing Medi-Cal reimbursement rates to provide quality breast pumps to mothers, California will eliminate a barrier to breastfeeding and help ensure healthier infants and children.

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