

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OCTOBER 25, 2016

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HOSPITALS MEETING ONGOING CHALLENGES TO SUPPORT THE BREASTFEEDING GOALS OF NEW MOTHERS

Sacramento, CA –

According to a report released today, California hospital breastfeeding rates have increased by 12% since 2010, benefiting tens of thousands of mothers and babies. The report and accompanying state and county fact sheets, *Using Data to Drive Change*, co-authored by California WIC Association (CWA) and UC Davis Human Lactation Center, show that more California hospitals have adopted comprehensive breastfeeding policies as part of their maternity care.

These 2015 data also show that substantial improvements have been made across all ethnic groups and across the entire state. Over the last five years, California maternity hospitals have seen these breastfeeding rates increase by 12% overall (representing more than 50,000 mothers), while the proportion of babies born in designated Baby-Friendly hospitals in the state has more than tripled.

However, despite this progress, too many breastfed infants receive formula during the short hospital stay. While nearly 94% of California women initiate breastfeeding, 27% of them end up feeding their babies formula before they leave the hospital, particularly in hospitals serving low-income mothers and babies. Positive and long-lasting health protections are strongest when breastfeeding is exclusive; that is, babies are fed nothing but breast milk. The data show that exclusivity and duration of breastfeeding are both increased by hospital policies supportive of breastfeeding.

“California has nearly one quarter of all the Baby Friendly Hospitals in the country and many more hospitals are adopting these evidence-based practices to improve the quality of care given to new mothers and babies. The success of efforts to support changes in California hospitals has been driven by data, made public each year by the California Department of Public Health and used to target and monitor quality improvement projects where they are most needed,” stated Jane Heinig, PhD, IBCLC, Executive Director, UC Davis Human Lactation Center and co-author of the report.

Four out of the five of the top performing hospitals in the state – all with exclusive breastfeeding rates above 90% - are designated Baby-Friendly. Hospitals in 10 counties were on the list of top-performing hospitals including Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, Kaiser Walnut Creek Hospital, Woodland Memorial Hospital, French Hospital Medical Center, UC San Francisco Hospital/Moffitt, El Camino Hospital, Marshall Hospital, Kaiser Oakland Hospital, and Santa Rosa Kaiser.

Unfortunately, progress has been slow among many of California’s lowest-scoring hospitals, including many that serve California’s poorest women and infants. Southern California hospitals dominate the list of the 15 lowest performing hospitals, including hospitals in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties. While some counties have persistently low exclusive breastfeeding rates, significant increases have occurred in several counties with historically low rates — including Imperial, Kern, San Joaquin, and Los Angeles — which speaks to the hard work they have been doing to support and educate mothers who give birth in their facilities.

“We are seeing the positive results of policy changes in California hospitals over the last five years and these changes were driven by the availability of local in-hospital breastfeeding rates. Mothers in California want to breastfeed. The success we’ve seen in hospitals can be expanded if consistent and comparable data are available on breastfeeding rates after hospital discharge.” said Robbie Gonzalez-Dow, Executive Director of the California Breastfeeding Coalition.

Breastfeeding success is often dependent on the support of hospital staff during those first critical 24 to 72 hours after delivery, especially for mothers facing early challenges. Support from hospital staff, evidence-based standards of care, and stronger hospital policies all play important roles in determining if a mother will continue to exclusively breastfeed her baby when the family goes home. The data bear out the positive impact when hospitals implement comprehensive policies.

Historic legislation passed in 2013, [SB 402](#), authored by Senators Kevin De León (D-LA) and Fran Pavley (D-Santa Monica), requires hospitals to adopt comprehensive policies for breastfeeding support, achieving Baby Friendly designation or utilizing an alternative set of evidence-based policies, by 2025. The number of Baby-Friendly hospitals in California has climbed steadily from only 12 in 2006 to more than 80 in October 2016. A companion bill, [SB 502](#), became effective in January of 2015 and required all hospitals to develop and disseminate infant feeding policies supporting breastfeeding.

This year marks the 9th release of the hospital breastfeeding data fact sheets and reports, and the changes seen in that time have been enormous, particularly considering the size and diversity of California. Breastfeeding promotion is critical to the health of California’s mothers and babies, and policy-makers and advocates have used publicly-reported data successfully to guide and evaluate policy improvements. Through local and statewide collaboration and implementation of supportive policies, in-hospital exclusive breastfeeding rates have increased consistently, to the benefit of nearly 300,000 California families. To continue this kind of progress, consistent and comparable data on breastfeeding exclusivity and duration are needed to inform efforts to change policy in medical, employment, and childcare environments.

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Editor’s Note:

To view the report online, please go to: <http://bit.ly/CWA2016HospitalReport> or contact Sarah Diaz sdiaz@calwic.org or (530) 750-2280.