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Nevada Honored for Breastfeeding Outreach Results

Efforts help reduce many health risks in both babies and mothers

Carson City, NV— Nevada has been recognized by the federal government as being among the top eight states in the country for supporting new mothers in reaching their breastfeeding goals, and as a result the state will receive additional funds to supplement its efforts.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced this month that the state of Nevada's Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program was named a 2015 Breastfeeding Performance Bonus Awardee. The awards go to states with the largest increases of exclusive breastfeeding rates, meaning infants receive nothing other than breast milk for the first six months of life.

According to a [2010 study](#) by Cambridge Health Alliance and Harvard Medical School, if 90 percent of families could comply with medical recommendations to breastfeed exclusively for six months, the United States would prevent more than 900 deaths and save \$13 billion a year from reduced direct and indirect medical costs and the cost of premature death. Lindsey Dermid-Gray, the statewide breastfeeding coordinator for Nevada WIC, says research suggests babies who are fed formula are at increased risk for many health conditions, including middle ear infection, stomach illness (including vomiting and diarrhea), childhood asthma, childhood obesity, diabetes, sudden infant death syndrome, and childhood leukemia. Similarly, mothers who do not breastfeed also open themselves up to additional health risks.

“In our WIC agencies, staff members have been working hard to strengthen the support provided to moms wishing to breastfeed,” said Michelle Walker, program manager for Nevada WIC. The agencies have provided mandatory week-long intensive breastfeeding trainings to all WIC staff and countless optional breastfeeding knowledge enhancement opportunities. Nevada WIC has significantly expanded the scope of educational materials provided at its clinics to include helpful tips to breastfeeding in the first few days, weeks and months; instructions for safely preparing formula; comparisons between the health benefits of formula and breast milk;

and introducing solids in a way that supports continued breastfeeding to the minimum recommended duration of 12 months.

In 2014, WIC began implementation of two statewide campaigns: a “Breastfeeding Welcomed Here” community support campaign, and a “Baby Steps to Breastfeeding Success” clinical provider training. The first campaign asked businesses to sign a pledge to ensure moms are treated respectfully while in their establishment, and to display a breastfeeding supportive sticker in their front window. Over the course of the year, nearly 60 businesses have taken this pledge.

“One of the largest barriers to breastfeeding is the discomfort women feel when nursing in public,” Dermid-Gray said. “Even though breastfeeding is as natural as pregnancy and childbirth, many are not used to seeing breasts used in a functional way. The ‘Breastfeeding Welcomed Here’ campaign aims to educate businesses on the law that protects women’s right to breastfeed in public, covered or otherwise, and sends a message to mothers that they don’t need to feel uncomfortable when providing nourishment to their child.”

The “Baby Steps” campaign trained hospital staff on best practices in infant feeding immediately after birth, so that more mothers reach our WIC clinics breastfeeding. So far, nearly 150 nurses have received this training.

This year, WIC Breastfeeding Performance Bonuses were presented to large (more than 1,000 infants) and small (less than 1,000 infants) high-performing WIC agencies with the greatest improvement in the percentage of exclusively breastfed infants over the past year. A total of \$500,000 has been awarded to eight state WIC agencies and Indian tribal organizations that have demonstrated successful breastfeeding promotion and support efforts. With the award Nevada will receive \$78,737 to supplement its ongoing breastfeeding outreach efforts.

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For a list of businesses throughout Nevada that signed the “Breastfeeding Welcome Here” campaign, visit <http://nevadabreastfeeds.org/breastfeeding-welcomed-here/>

Nevada Department of Health and Human Services
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