

Arkansas Promotes Breastfeeding Through Public and Private Partnerships

Background

To change social norms around breastfeeding in the community, the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) provided access to a dedicated lactation area at a major public event, which provided women with a private and clean location to breastfeed. Complementary to one of the nine goals outlined in the [Healthy Active Arkansas](#) (HAA) framework, the department has also sought to increase breastfeeding in the state by improving policies and practices at worksites and in hospitals.

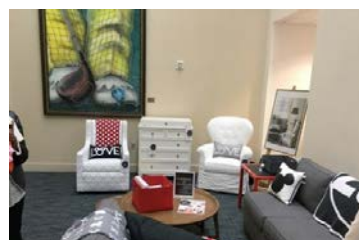
ADH and other partners involved in HAA chose breastfeeding as one priority in a 10-year strategic framework in order to improve the health of its residents, with a focus on health from birth. HAA's [breastfeeding priority](#) encourages women, health service providers, employers, and communities to adopt, implement, and monitor programs and policies to increase the proportion of mothers who start or continue breastfeeding. Strategies to meet this goal include increasing hospitals designated as Baby-Friendly, providing access to professional lactation counseling, and providing telehealth resources for breastfeeding mothers. Under the umbrella of HAA, the health department partners with the breastfeeding task force, hospitals, foundations, hospitals, faith-based partners, and community-based organizations who are committed to improving the state's breastfeeding environment.

About 74 percent of Arkansas' infants were [ever breastfed](#), compared to 83 percent of infants in the United States. Moreover, barely a quarter of infants still breastfed at one year in Arkansas, compared to 35 percent nationally. Maternal and child health experts [recommend](#) breastfeeding immediately following birth for at least one year and exclusive breastfeeding through six months of age. For most infants and mothers, breastfeeding [provides](#) an array of benefits and protective factors.

Steps Taken

Access to "Nursing Nooks" in Public Spaces:

- The ADH team, as part of HAA, initiated a partnership with the Junior League of Little Rock and Ethan Allen furniture stores to create a [nursing nook](#) at [Holiday House](#), the Junior League's premiere holiday shopping marketplace that attracts over 150,000 attendees. The team reached out to a local Ethan Allen store manager who responded quickly and positively, providing comfortable, appealing furniture for the nursing nook—a private area for mothers to nurse their children or express milk. Other partners assisted with everything from furniture transport to onsite lactation support.
- The [HAA's Ambassadors](#) initiative is a program designed by the ADH to provide participants with ideas and tools that can support projects that generate a culture of physical activity and good nutrition in schools, workplaces, or communities. One HAA ambassador recognized the need for



Nursing Nook at Holiday House

lactation accommodations at Philander Smith College, which is part of the Historically Black College or University (HBCU) network. To improve breastfeeding access on campus, the HAA ambassador worked with the ADH's [SISTERS UNITED](#) initiative, which unites African-American sorority sisters across the state. The ambassador presented information to campus leaders about the legal accommodation requirements and the benefits of having lactation accommodations for both faculty and students. By securing furniture donations and a space in the wellness center at Philander Smith College, the Ambassador created the [first nursing nook at a HBCU in Arkansas](#).



Nursing Nook at Philander Smith College

Workplace Accommodations:

- The ADH Worksite Wellness program, along with the department's office of minority health and health disparities, provides information about the importance of being a breastfeeding-friendly worksite to support employees and to help businesses retain staff. They encourage employers to work with pregnant staff before they go on maternity leave to ensure that a plan is in place for when they return to work. This approach helps women stay in their jobs longer because they know they have a supportive environment to express their milk, bring their babies to breastfeed, or take time to go to daycare to feed their infants.
- ADH provides employers with step-by-step technical assistance and success stories with photos that share approaches from other employers. ADH has found that those types of examples humanize the issue and help employers understand the true benefits and negligible costs of lactation accommodations. Examples include lactation accommodations from large corporations, as well as small "mom-and-pop" types of operations, showing that even small changes to spaces can help employees. It also provides some sample policies to help if an organization is not sure how to create a useful lactation policy.

Improving Supportive Breastfeeding Practices in Hospitals:

- HAA has worked to increase the number of hospitals designated under the [Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative](#) (BFHI). In May 2018, HAA partners convened a [Baby-Friendly Arkansas](#) summit at the Baptist Health Medical Center in Little Rock. The summit was designed to support all the state's birthing facilities in adopting and implementing the [Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding](#), with policies and practices designed to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates. During the summit, hospitals that have already begun working towards BFHI designation provided guidance and support to new hospitals undertaking the first steps. A grant from Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas allowed for two participants to attend the summit and a certified lactation consulting course.

Next Steps

- HAA will have another nursing nook at the 2019 Junior League of Little Rock's Holiday House event and will begin the process of transitioning ownership of the nursing nook. This provides a demonstration to communities and organizations how to adopt similar public and private partnerships. Additionally, HAA will continue to seek out additional venues and partners to replicate this model at other large public gatherings, such as conferences and special events.

- ADH is working with the National Association of State Offices of Minority Health to replicate the nursing nook model at events tailored to minority populations.
- Arkansas has seven hospitals currently designated as Baby-Friendly, with several others adopting some of the Ten Steps for Healthy Breastfeeding.

Lessons Learned

ADH offers the following “lessons learned” to other states looking to improve worksite accommodations or both increase access to and acceptability surrounding breastfeeding in public venues:

- *Walk the walk:* Begin by looking at policies and practices within the health department or organization to ensure that they have addressed any barriers to breastfeeding and are “walking the walk.” ADH is simultaneously ensuring a supportive breastfeeding environment for its own employees, learning firsthand about implementation challenges and serving as a strong role model for other state agencies.
- *Create the desire:* Although human resources departments are responsible for drafting and implementing policies, the more employees are aware of what options might exist, social norms within the workplace will shift, and employees will come to expect and demand breastfeeding accommodations.
- *Humanize the issue and solutions—and make the business case:* When working with new employers, the team has found it helpful to provide anecdotes and pictures to help humanize the need and simplify approaches to providing breastfeeding accommodations in the worksite. The team has also found it helpful to provide data to make the business case for breastfeeding.
- *Advertise breastfeeding accommodations. In this case, the adage “build it and they will come” does not hold true.* Audiences, whether conference or event attendees or employees, need to be made aware of lactation accommodations through signage, window decals, new employee orientation, or annual performance reviews. If people are unaware of the accommodations, they will not use them.

For More Information

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