

Improving Breastfeeding in South Dakota: Helping Businesses Support Customers and Employees

Background

As a participant in ASTHO's 2014 – 2018 [Breastfeeding Learning Community](#) South Dakota Department of Health (SDDOH) focused on increasing breastfeeding duration by supporting breastfeeding-friendly worksites. For many women, returning to work after delivery poses a challenge to successful breastfeeding. Although large employers are legally required to provide clean space and time during the workday for expressing milk, many women struggle to continue breastfeeding or pumping once they return to work. Women often face significant barriers to lactation workplace support. In the first three years of the learning community, SDDOH partnered with employers in Brookings, Aberdeen, and Mitchell (all located on the east side of the state) to create and incentivize breastfeeding-friendly work environments. By 2017, over 375 businesses in South Dakota had taken the pledge to become breastfeeding-friendly. Recognizing that only sixteen of those businesses were in the Black Hills region (west side of state), SDDOH expanded their efforts in the Black Hills region in year four.

Steps Taken

Creating Breastfeeding-Friendly Businesses

In 2016, SDDOH, in partnership with Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce, Brookings Health System South Dakota Breastfeeding Coalition, South Dakota State University, and the SDSU Extension launched the [Breastfeeding-Friendly Business Initiative](#) (BFBI). SDDOH's BFBI provides incentives, resources, and policy guidance to help businesses create breastfeeding-friendly worksites. BFBI encourages businesses to take an online pledge to show their support for breastfeeding customers and employees. SDDOH aimed to show that by participating, businesses are committed to supporting breastfeeding mothers, their infants, and families. Participating businesses commit to providing a welcoming environment where mothers can breastfeed in public or private spaces and ensure appropriate time and space necessary to pump for breastfeeding employees. These businesses also receive a Breastfeeding-Friendly Business Kit, which includes [signage](#), practical tips for training employees and creating breastfeeding support for employees, and a Breastfeeding Support Policy outlining actions employers can take to create a breastfeeding-friendly worksite.

Businesses who take the pledge are featured on the BFBI website. Through this online recognition, SDDOH increased public and employer awareness of BFBI across the state. As of 2019, more than 640 businesses in South Dakota have pledged their support. BFBI also created the [Breastfeeding Accommodation Form](#) a communication tool that employers and employees can use to proactively work together to plan for breastfeeding accommodation needs after a maternity leave.

Partnerships and Expansion

SDDOH partnered with South Dakota State University Extension to co-lead the BFBI, and together the team used a community-specific approach to promote the BFBI throughout the state. The team launched its first BFBI promotion in Brookings, and later expanded its efforts to Aberdeen, Mitchell, and the Black Hills area. This approach allowed SDDOH to test, grow, and adjust strategies, tools, and methodology. Additionally, SDDOH was able to build, enhance, and sustain community partnerships, allowing for more locally-specific and locally-led programs.

SDDOH developed strategic partnerships with South Dakota State University, Presentation College, National American University of Rapid City, and Black Hills State University. Students from these institutions became vital advocates for breastfeeding, going door-to-door to canvass businesses to share information about the BFBI and the pledge. As trusted members of the community and patrons of local businesses, these students delivered compelling messages and were successful at increasing visibility and encouraging businesses to take the pledge.

Finally, SDDOH collaborated internally between the Department's Office of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and the state's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). This partnership heightened awareness of the BFBI with WIC breastfeeding peer counselors, registered nurses, and dietitians. Consequently, WIC could promote BFBI resources to women and empower them to know their rights and use talking points during employment discussions.

Barriers

- South Dakota is vast and largely rural, and many employers are small, “mom and pop” businesses with few employees. BFBI support aimed to help employers who may lack internal support or in-house expertise regarding breastfeeding-friendly worksites, and the initiative had great success getting smaller businesses to take the pledge. However, BFBI was less likely to get smaller businesses to implement official breastfeeding support policies, as many of these businesses did not have any formal, written human resources policies. By contrast, it was more difficult to get mid- and large-sized businesses to take the BFBI pledge without time-intensive meetings and presentations, but when these businesses were supportive, it was more feasible to officially implement breastfeeding policies.
- Lack of data on policy implementation, understanding the impact of strategies on behavior change, and the distinguishing factors that lead to increased breastfeeding duration rates is challenging. South Dakota's breastfeeding programs rely on data from the CDC [Breastfeeding Report Card](#) and [mPINC Survey](#) as primary data sources to inform implementation efforts. Although outcome data is collected, including data on breastfeeding duration, the data is only collected and analyzed periodically. This lack of consistent analysis undermines strategy implementation, adjustments, and improvement strategies.

Next Steps

SDDOH is continuing its partnership with SDSU Extension to implement the BFBI, and the team is planning to expand its efforts to new communities throughout the state to ensure that breastfeeding programs remain a priority in South Dakota.

About ASTHO's Breastfeeding Program

ASTHO has partnered with CDC to support 18 states and the District of Columbia through the [State Breastfeeding Learning Community](#). This collaboration aims to create sustainable, scalable approaches to improving breastfeeding rates and addressing barriers to breastfeeding. State partners focus on three evidence-based system-level strategies:

- Improving hospital policies and practices.
- Enhancing peer and professional support.
- Assisting employers in the creation of breastfeeding-friendly worksites.

Additional Resources:

[ASTHO State Health Agency Breastfeeding Promotion and Support](#)

Contacts

Megan Hlavacek, MS, RDN, LN, CLC
Healthy Foods Coordinator
South Dakota Department of Health
(605) 598-6277
Megan.Hlavacek@state.sd.us

Ify Mordi, MPH, PMP
Director, Maternal and Infant Health Improvement
ASTHO
(202) 371-9090
imordi@astho.org