



REPORT FOR ACTION

A Change in Approach: Toronto Public Health's Implementation of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario's Breastfeeding Best Practice Guidelines

Date: September 3, 2020

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) is an internationally-recognized designation that was started in 1991 by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to encourage practices that protect, promote, and support breastfeeding. In 2013 and 2018, Toronto Public Health was granted BFI designation by the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada. Designation can be obtained every five years by successfully completing a rigorous, multifaceted process.

In addition, since 2019 Toronto Public Health has implemented the [Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario's Breastfeeding Best Practice Guidelines \(BPGs\) entitled: Breastfeeding - Promoting and Supporting the Initiation, Exclusivity, and Continuation of Breastfeeding for Newborns, Infants, and Young Children \(2018\)](#). The BPGs offer 16 evidence-based breastfeeding education and promotion recommendations that incorporate all BFI principles.

The 2008 *Ontario Public Health Standards* made BFI designation a performance indicator for public health units. However, this indicator was removed in the *Standards'* 2018 update. Obtaining BFI designation was initially beneficial to develop practices to support breastfeeding. Given that obtaining BFI designation is a recurring resource-intensive endeavour, and now that strong practices have been established, Toronto Public Health will maintain its BFI designation until 2023 and, thereafter, continue to implement the BPGs' recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

In February 2013, the Board of Health received an update from the Medical Officer of Health of Toronto Public Health's first successful BFI designation.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-55580.pdf>

In April, 2011, the Board of Health received an update from the Medical Officer of Health on progress towards BFI designation.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2011/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-36794.pdf>

In March 2010, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health work toward Toronto Public Health's achievement of BFI designation and to support Toronto birthing hospitals with their achievement of BFI designation.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-28171.pdf>

In January 2007, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health develop a breastfeeding report card for the City of Toronto.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/hl/minutes/2007-01-29-hl01-mn.pdf>

In September 2001, the Board of Health received an update from the Medical Officer of Health on Toronto Public Health's comprehensive approach to breastfeeding promotion and adoption of The Code.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2001/minutes/committees/hl/hl010924.pdf>

COMMENTS

The Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) is an internationally-recognized designation that was initiated in 1991 by the World Health Organization and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund to encourage practices that protect, promote, and support breastfeeding.

Toronto Public Health and the Ontario Public Health Standards:

The 2008 *Ontario Public Health Standards* (OPHS) Ministry-Board of Health Accountability Agreement required all Ontario public health units to obtain BFI designation as a public health performance indicator¹. In 2013 and 2018, Toronto Public Health (TPH) was granted BFI designation by the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada.

In 2018, the OPHS were updated and granted new autonomy to public health units regarding breastfeeding policy. Specifically, as of 2018, BFI designation is no longer a performance indicator in the Ministry-Board of Health Accountability Agreement.

Instead, the 2018 *OPHS* directs public health units to implement programming related to breastfeeding based on the assessment of local needs².

Toronto Public Health and the Baby-Friendly Initiative:

Toronto Public Health obtained the BFI designation by successfully implementing the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative's ten evidence-based practices to support breastfeeding. These practices include: providing information about breastfeeding benefits and best practices, not giving substitutes (artificial milk or pacifiers), and establishing breastfeeding support groups and referring new parents to them, among others. Going beyond these steps, TPH's wide variety of breastfeeding supports include: breastfeeding clinics, 'Healthy Babies Healthy Children' home visits, telephone counselling and e-chat services. These policies and practices encourage and support mothers with breastfeeding in order to improve child health outcomes.

In addition, TPH is committed to upholding the principles of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* (The Code) and compliance is a requirement of BFI designation. The Code was created to address declining breastfeeding rates, increasing rates of disease in children and the unethical marketing of breast-milk substitutes. The Code applies to all products that are marketed to replace breast-milk as well as feeding bottles and teats³.

Toronto Public Health and the Breastfeeding Best Practice Guidelines:

In 2012, TPH was officially designated as a Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO). Best Practice Spotlight Organizations are health care and academic organizations selected by the RNAO to implement and evaluate their Best Practice Guidelines (BPGs) which cover a broad range of topics in nursing and healthcare practice. The [RNAO Breastfeeding Best Practice Guidelines \(BPGs\) are entitled: "Breastfeeding - Promoting and Supporting the Initiation, Exclusivity, and Continuation of Breastfeeding for Newborns, Infants, and Young Children \(2018\)."](#)

The Breastfeeding BPGs are 16 systematically developed and evidence-based recommendations for health care practitioners, policy-makers and families. The recommendations are best practices and supports for providing the best possible breastfeeding care. They also incorporate all BFI principles, including compliance with The Code⁴. Adhering to the guidelines does not involve a designation process.

Next Steps:

It has been determined that implementation of the Breastfeeding BPGs will provide similar benefits to those achieved through obtaining BFI designation but through a less resource-intensive process. As a result, Toronto Public Health is committed to maintaining its BFI designation until 2023 but will not pursue BFI re-designation thereafter.

Toronto Public Health will continue to maintain a culture that supports the key tenets of the BFI through the ongoing implementation of the BPGs and adherence to The Code, including the provision of high-quality services that support families with their infant-feeding decisions.

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SIGNATURE

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REFERENCES

¹ Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2013) Technical Document: Public Health Accountability Agreement Indicators 2011-13.

² Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (OMHLTC). (2018). Protecting and Promoting the Health of Ontarians, Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services and Accountability. Revised July 2018.

³ International Baby Food Action Network. (2002). Promoting Infant Health
A Health Workers' Guide to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk

⁴ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2018). Breastfeeding – Promoting and Supporting the Initiation, Exclusivity, and Continuation of Breastfeeding for Newborns, Infants, and Young Children Third Edition.