Breastfeeding Advocacy Initiative
For the best start in life

BREASTFEEDING GIVES CHILDREN THE BEST START IN LIFE

Breastmilk is nature’s perfect food. It is universally available. Its benefits last a lifetime, for mother as well as child.

Yet currently less than 40 per cent of children worldwide under six months of age are exclusively breastfed—that is, fed only breastmilk with no additional foods or liquids, including water. This figure has remained relatively unchanged for nearly two decades.

Breastfeeding is of critical importance to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and future Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, and evidence for this continues to grow.

- From the first hour of a baby’s life through age two or later, breastfeeding protects against illness and death—whether the child is born in a high-income or low-income country, to a rich family or a poor one.
- Breastmilk acts as the baby’s first immunization. Immediate skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding in the first hour of life significantly reduce newborn mortality.
- Breastfeeding is essential for early childhood development. It supports healthy brain development, increased I.Q. scores and better school performance.
- Breastfeeding benefits maternal health by improving birth spacing and reducing the risk of postpartum haemorrhage. Women who breastfeed have a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers and some cardiovascular diseases.
- Breastfeeding decreases the risk of non-communicable diseases, including childhood asthma, obesity, diabetes and heart disease later in life.
- Breastfeeding provides a natural, renewable food that needs no packaging, transportation, storage, or cooking, making it environmentally friendly.

Despite this compelling scientific evidence, political commitment to and financial investment in breastfeeding are low. According to a study conducted by UNICEF, reasons for this include insufficient global leadership, low prioritization by policymakers and donors and aggressive marketing by breastmilk substitute companies. Women also face many barriers to breastfeeding in the workplace and beyond.

Rapid progress is possible however, and some countries have made dramatic progress to raise breastfeeding rates.
UNICEF and WHO, along with a range of partners, have formed a global advocacy initiative to increase political commitment to and investment for breastfeeding as the cornerstone of child nutrition, health and development.

VISION
A world where all mothers and families are empowered, enabled and supported to optimally breastfeed their children, and where early initiation, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond, together with appropriate, adequate and safe complementary foods, become the social norm that helps children survive and thrive to their full potential.

MISSION
To galvanize political, financial and social support to scale up breastfeeding programmes and to encourage adoption of supportive legal instruments and policies at the global, regional and country levels within the broader development, humanitarian and human rights agendas, thus accelerating progress to meet or exceed the World Health Assembly global target calling for an increase in the rate of exclusive breastfeeding to at least 50 per cent by 2025.

Our advocacy efforts involve a phased approach. Initial efforts are focused on galvanizing attention around the WHA global target to increase exclusive breastfeeding rates, while recognizing that further ambitious targets should be set for the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. Advocacy efforts will also aim to increase early initiation of breastfeeding for newborns as a foundation for optimal practices and to promote continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond, with appropriate complementary foods.

STRATEGIC GOALS
The Breastfeeding Advocacy Initiative has three strategic goals:
- Foster leadership and alliances and effectively integrate and communicate breastfeeding messages.
- Mobilize resources and promote accountability.
- Build knowledge and evidence to enhance breastfeeding policies, programmes, financing and communication.

JOIN US!

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