

ADVOCACY GUIDANCE AND TOOLS

4. IMPLEMENTING THE BABY-FRIENDLY HOSPITAL INITIATIVE IN MATERNITY AND NEWBORN FACILITIES

Providing breastfeeding support in facilities with maternity and newborn services is critical for improving breastfeeding practices, protecting women's health, and giving all children the healthiest start in life. Globally, the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) has been one of the most effective interventions for enabling optimal breastfeeding practices across different countries and contexts. Launched globally by WHO and UNICEF in 1991, the BFHI promotes improved policies and procedures in maternity facilities to support mothers to initiate breastfeeding in the first hour of life and obtain the skills to continue breastfeeding after discharge. The BFHI is based on the [Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding](#) (the Ten Steps) and recognizes the role that maternity and newborn facilities have in providing mothers with skills and support for successful breastfeeding.



Led by UNICEF and WHO, the Global Breastfeeding Collective (the Collective) is a partnership of more than 20 international organizations with the goal of increasing investment and policy change to support breastfeeding worldwide, which requires advocacy at the global, national, and sub-national levels.

Developed by the Collective, this document is one of seven briefs that provide guidance and resources to stakeholders on how to advocate for adoption of these policy actions with government ministries, health care workers and managers, employers, donors, and other key decision-makers.

**GLOBAL BREASTFEEDING
COLLECTIVE**



THE PROBLEM

Many health facilities and professionals are not delivering optimal breastfeeding promotion and support for mothers, families, and newborns.

Many health professionals lack the skills to support breastfeeding, and health facility policies often obstruct mothers from establishing breastfeeding. While the BFHI has been introduced in almost all countries, the WHO estimates that in 2017, only 10 per cent of births occurred in a baby-friendly facility¹.

THE SOLUTION

National BFHI implementation can strengthen health worker practices, increase rates of optimal breastfeeding, and improve health, social, and economic outcomes for individuals and nations.

The Ten Steps are proven to improve breastfeeding outcomes. Evidence from 58 studies found that facilities' adherence to BFHI guidance positively impacted breastfeeding outcomes, including increasing the likelihood of early initiation of breastfeeding and the duration of exclusive breastfeeding. Additionally, a meta-analysis of 195 studies showed that the BFHI was one of the most effective health systems interventions for improving breastfeeding².

BFHI is also cost-effective in reducing morbidity—comparable to the cost-effectiveness of immunization, vitamin A supplementation, and short-term tuberculosis therapy³. Case studies from 13 countries implementing the BFHI show that it has enhanced infant feeding practices and fostered community resilience through empowering mothers. Gaps in the implementation of the BFHI represent a missed opportunity to cost-effectively ensure healthy societies by improving breastfeeding practices¹.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT BFHI ADVOCACY

On building the capacities of all maternity and newborn staff to sustainably implement the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding:

[Country Experiences with BFHI: Compendium of Case Studies from Around the World](#)

This UNICEF-WHO report provides lessons learned on BFHI implementation, including those related to the capacity-building of maternity staff in 13 countries.

[ABM Clinical Protocol #7: Model Maternity Policy Supportive of Breastfeeding](#)

This clinical protocol can serve as a guideline for providing care to breastfeeding mothers and newborns and aid in improving the capacity of health providers.

On improving funding mechanisms—including increasing government contributions and drawing from other sustainable sources—to ensure that BFHI programmes are implemented sustainably and at scale:

[The Global Breastfeeding Collective Case for Investment](#)

This tool overviews the cost-effectiveness of breastfeeding and includes key statistics that can be used for advocacy.

[The World Breastfeeding Costing Initiative: The Need to Invest in Babies](#)

This resource provides evidence and strategies to advocate for improving BFHI investments.

On integrating BFHI into national standards, including through capacity-building, internal and external monitoring, and budgeting, to ensure sustainability:

[Implementation Guidance: Protecting, Promoting and Supporting Breastfeeding in Facilities Providing Maternity and Newborn Services: The Revised BFHI](#)

This updated BFHI guidance for policy-makers and health facility managers can be used for advocating for country-level policy development and program implementation.

[IBFAN/ICDC Fact Sheet: BFHI and the Code](#)

This brief provides policy makers, hospital directors, and health staff with information on being compliant with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, which was explicitly added as a requirement under the revised BFHI as part of Step 1 of the Ten Steps.

Additional tools for creating an advocacy strategy:

[UNICEF Advocacy Toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives](#)

This toolkit provides practical tools for country leaders for building and carrying out an advocacy strategy.

[Alive & Thrive Guide for Public Health Advocacy: Tools and Lessons Learned from Successful IYCF Advocacy in Southeast Asia](#)

This guide can be used to develop a nutrition advocacy strategy through a four-step process for policy change.

[Global Breastfeeding Scorecard](#)

This tool reviews national progress in implementing key breastfeeding interventions to encourage countries to support breastfeeding.

CONCLUSION

Realizing the full potential of the BFHI will require strong alliances between government, civil society, health professional associations, and other stakeholders. Together, we can ensure that every maternity facility gives its mothers and newborns an opportunity to start their breastfeeding relationship out right.

SOURCES

- ¹ National implementation of the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017.
- ² Pérez-Escamilla R, Martinez JL, Segura-Pérez S. Impact of the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative on breastfeeding and child health outcomes: a systematic review. *Matern Child Nutr.* 2016;12:402–417.
- ³ Sinha B, Chowdhury R, Sankar MJ, et al. Interventions to improve breastfeeding outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Acta Paediatr.* 2015.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:

www.k4health.org/toolkits/breastfeeding-advocacy-toolkit to view the Breastfeeding Advocacy Toolkit

and www.unicef.org/breastfeeding for more information about the Global Breastfeeding Collective

Global Breastfeeding Collective Partners: 1000 Days | Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine | Action Against Hunger | Alive and Thrive | Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation | CARE | Carolina Global Breastfeeding Institute | Center for Women’s Health and Wellness | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | Concern Worldwide | Helen Keller International | International Baby Food Action Network | International Lactation Consultant Association | La Leche League International | New Partnership for Africa’s Development | Nutrition International | PATH | Save the Children | UNICEF | United States Agency for International Development | WHO | World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action | World Bank | World Vision International

World Health Organization (WHO)
Avenue Appia 20
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
www.who.int/en

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
www.unicef.org

unicef.org/breastfeeding

Permission is required to reproduce any part of this publication.
Permissions will be freely granted to educational or non-profit organizations.

WHO/NMH/NHD/19.5
© World Health Organization and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2019.
Some rights reserved. This work is available under the [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/) license.
© UNICEF/UN0202896/Serbia: Cover Photo