Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland -
HSE Action Plan 2016 -2021

Update from
The National Breastfeeding Implementation Group - 2017
Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland- HSE Action Plan 2016-2021

Introduction
The National Breastfeeding Implementation Group was established to oversee the implementation of Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland – HSE Action Plan 2016-2021. An implementation plan was agreed in late 2016 and the group held its first meeting in November 2016. The terms of reference and membership are outlined in Appendix 1.

This report outlines the work undertaken in 2017 to achieve the overarching aim of the Breastfeeding Action Plan - to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates, by supporting and enabling more mothers to breastfeed.

The National Breastfeeding Implementation Group is working to achieve the aims and objectives of the Breastfeeding Action Plan through the implementation of initiatives in the following areas:

1. Improved governance and health service structures
2. Breastfeeding training and skills development
3. Health service policies and practices
4. Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum through social marketing, support and advocacy.
5. Research, monitoring and evaluation

The following is a brief update on the main actions of the Breastfeeding Action Plan that have been undertaken this year.

1. Improved Governance and Health Service Structures
The HSE National Breastfeeding Implementation Group includes representatives from Public Health, the National Healthy Childhood Programme, the Women and Infants Health Programme, CHO Health & Wellbeing leads, Health Promotion and Improvement, the Healthy Eating Active Living programme and the National Dietetics Advisor. The group links with the HSE Communications Division, the Healthy Ireland team and the National Healthy Childhood and Nurture programmes. The Implementation Group consult with other relevant professionals in Primary Care and Acute Services Divisions as required. Other key disciplines including Clinical Midwife Specialist/Clinical Nurse Specialists (CMS/CNS) in Lactation and Public Health Nurses (PHN) will be invited to participate in relevant sub groups that will be established to progress key priority areas of the Breastfeeding Action Plan.

The group held monthly meetings/teleconferences. Presentations were given by team members on the Healthy Childhood Policy Priority Programme, HSE Breastfeeding Action Plan - Implementation & Project Plans, and the Breastfeeding Mapping Project 2017. The reports from the Health Research Board on ‘Interventions that promote increased breastfeeding rates’ ‘Breastfeeding Implementation in three countries’ were presented to the group. Dr Louise Doherty, Specialist in Public Health Medicine CHO 1 presented work undertaken by the Donegal Breastfeeding Forum to the group.

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1 Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland Health Service Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016 – 2021 Available at: https://www.breastfeeding.ie/Resources/Health-professional/Policy.html
2 HSE Breastfeeding Action Plan Implementation Plan 2017-2019 Available at: INSERT LINK HERE
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1.1 The Breastfeeding Mapping Project

During 2017 a survey of breastfeeding services in maternity hospitals/units and in the community was undertaken. Up to date information on current breastfeeding resources in hospitals and the community is essential in order to establish the baseline from which the current plan is working and to aid with planning future services.

Eighteen of the nineteen maternity hospitals/units (95%) responded. All Community Health Organisations (CHO) responded to varying degrees, with an overall response per Local Health Office (LHO) area of 80%.

The data provides information on

- the geographical location of breastfeeding specialist posts;
- the availability of Health Care Professional (HCP) breastfeeding education and skills development;
- the methods of data collection on breastfeeding rates and the presence of breastfeeding committees;
- the services provided for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers including: education, support, referral pathways to support, and access to breast pumps, in maternity hospitals and CHOs.

We would like to thank all respondents in the maternity hospitals and CHOs for their contribution to this Mapping Project. The summary report will be available in early 2018.

Data from the Mapping Study were used to develop business cases for the 2018 Estimates Submissions Process, in partnership with the Primary Care Division and the Women and Infants Health Programme. In order to progress Actions 1.3, 1.4 and 3.8 of the Breastfeeding Action Plan business cases were prepared for

A. additional lactation consultant posts both in the maternity hospitals/units and CHOs,
B. provision of suitable breast pumps, free of charge, to all mothers of preterm and hospitalised infants, and breastfeeding mothers hospitalised after maternity/paediatric discharge.

At time of writing the group are waiting an update from the Women and Infants Health Programme in relation to funding for additional posts. Unfortunately the submission for funding to provide breast pumps was not successful. The group will continue to prioritise these two actions for implementation.
2. Breastfeeding Training and Skills Development

Actions to implement breastfeeding training and skills development were undertaken in partnership with the Nurture Programme. The Nurture Programme is a programme of work designed to improve information and professional supports provided to parents during pregnancy and the first three years of life. The aim of the Nurture Programme is to support parents and HCPs in their respective caring and service provision roles. The programme is a key enabler of the overall National Healthy Childhood Programme.

The Nurture Programme is funding the development of a suite of breastfeeding training programmes and a framework for overall delivery.

The training will focus on three different levels:

- **Level 1 (Unit 1):** this will be through an online elearning programme which will be available on HSELanD. The development of the modules are at an advanced stage and include an introduction to breastfeeding including the importance of breastfeeding and infant feeding policies; antenatal discussion; early postnatal period and assessment of a breastfeed and use of the Breastfeeding Observation Assessment Tool (BOAT) resource.

- **Level 2 (Unit 2):** will also be through an online elearning programme that will be available on HSELanD. The development of these modules is also at an advanced stage. The content includes early breastfeeding challenges; late breastfeeding challenges; issues concerning breastfeeding in public and in the workplace.

- **Level 3:** this will focus on skills development in a face-to-face training environment. Work is due to commence on the development of this aspect of the training in quarter one 2018.

The units are being developed for PHNs, Community Medical Doctors (CMDs), Practice Nurses (PNs), midwives and front line staff who support breastfeeding. Level 3 is for staff working directly to support mothers and babies to breastfeed including PHNs and midwives.

Breastfeeding training/education seminars are also provided annually for IBCLCs (International Board Certified Lactation Consultants) and other Health Care Professionals (HCP), in partnership with the Association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland (ALCI) and La Leche League of Ireland. These events receive funding from HSE Health Promotion & Improvement through Section 39 grants.

In 2017, two HCP seminars were provided by La Leche League of Ireland in Trinity College Dublin and Limerick University Maternity Hospital on March 2nd and 3rd respectively. The key note speakers were Professor Helen Ball, University of Durham and Helen Gray LLL GB / IBCLC.

The Association of Lactation Consultants of Ireland Spring Study day was held on March 25th in the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital. The key note speakers were Dr. Wendy Jones, Breastfeeding Network UK and Professor Cecily Begley, TCD. The ALCI annual 2 day conference and training event took place on the 29th and 30th of September in Limerick. The keynote speaker was US author and international speaker on breastfeeding issues, Lisa Marasco FILCA, IBCLC.

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3. Health Service Policies and Practices

The Primary Care Breastfeeding Policy, Procedure, Protocol and Guideline (PPPG) Development Group was established in 2017 and the group developed the Breastfeeding Observation and Assessment Tool (BOAT) and guideline. Accurate assessment helps to improve breastfeeding outcomes for mother and baby and allows for targeted advice to be offered to mothers to acquire early breastfeeding skills. The content from the UNICEF/UK Breastfeeding Assessment Tool and the BOAT tool developed by Dublin North LHO was adapted (with permission) for this resource. The BOAT tool and guideline will be used by the public health nurse/registered midwife (PHN/RM) at the first or primary visit following observation of the baby breastfeeding. The group are working with the National Practice Development Co-Ordinator Public Health Nursing Services and the National Reference Group for Practice Development Initiatives in the PHN Service in the Office of the Nursing & Midwifery Services Director. The BOAT tool and guideline will be reviewed by the Reference Group in Quarter 1 2018.

The PPPG group is also updating the Infant Feeding Policy for Primary Care Teams and Community Healthcare Settings (2015). This work will continue in 2018.

The Maternity and Neonatal Breastfeeding PPPG Development Group was established in 2017 and is currently updating the Infant Feeding Policy for the Maternity and Neonatal Services (2015). The outcome of this policy update is that maternity hospitals deliver evidence-based care and supportive practices. It will also ensure that mothers receive skilled support, appropriate to their needs, to initiate and maintain breastfeeding following the birth of their babies.

We would very specially like to thank all members of both PPPG Development Groups for their continued commitment and dedication in the update and development of these resources for healthcare professionals.

In line with Actions 3.12 and 3.13 a programme of work commenced in 2017 to develop HSE policies that will support HSE employees to continue to breastfeed on return to work following maternity leave and that will strengthen compliance with the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes. A wide consultation process on drafts of both policies commenced in 2017 and will conclude in 2018.

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4. Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum through social marketing, support and advocacy.

The National Breastfeeding Implementation Group is partnering with key divisions to develop supports for mothers at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum.

4.1 The Nurture Programme

The Nurture Programme Implementation Plan is delivered through six interconnected implementation teams:

1. Knowledge and Communications
2. Antenatal to Postnatal
3. Health & Wellbeing Promotion and Improvement
4. Infant Mental Health and Supporting Parents
5. Standardised Health Records for Parents and Professionals
6. Training and Resources

The national and assistant national Breastfeeding Co-ordinators are members of two of these teams – the Antenatal to Postnatal Team and the Health and Wellbeing Promotion and Improvement Team. Input has been given to developing a Pregnancy Book, Standards for Antenatal Education, developing key messages for parents and professionals and providing relevant information for the new child health website and to the review and updating of the Caring for Your Baby Books.

4.2 www.breastfeeding.ie

The content of the website www.breastfeeding.ie is reviewed regularly and updated. Monthly continuous quality improvement (CQI) is undertaken and shared with the International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) who provide ongoing support to the Ask Our Expert service on the site. It includes a review of the email responses, Webchat and HSE Breastfeeding Facebook Private Messages provided by online Ask Our Expert IBCLCs. Between October 2016 and October 2017 there have been in total:

- 1,879 Ask Our Expert email responses
- 1,932 Webchats
- 108 Facebook Private Messages.

A suite of Breastfeeding Factsheets for Health Care Professionals was developed in 2017. There are in total ten factsheets and include:

- Positioning and Attachment of Baby to the Breast
- Tongue Tie
- Low Milk Supply
- Breastfeeding and Cigarette Smoking
- The Evidence for Breastfeeding
- Antenatal Infant Feeding Discussion
- The use of Soothers and Nipple Shields
- The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.
- Mastitis
- Nipple Pain

We would like to very specially thank The Association of Lactation Consultants (ALCI) and all the Health Care Professionals who so generously gave of their time, knowledge and expertise in the development of these factsheets. They are available at https://www.breastfeeding.ie/Resources/Health-professional/Fact-sheets.html.
4.3 National Breastfeeding Week Campaign

The theme of this year’s National Breastfeeding Week (October 1st to 7th) was *Every Breastfeed Makes a Difference*. There were many events facilitated across the country to spread this message and to give families information on the supports available on www.breastfeeding.ie and from the HSE health care professionals and voluntary breastfeeding organisations.

Mrs. Sabina Higgins hosted a reception in Aras an Uachtaráin on Monday 2nd of October to celebrate National Breastfeeding Week 2017. The reception was for mothers and babies, the Association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland and representatives from maternity hospitals, community, and voluntary breastfeeding groups, Cuidiu, La Leche League and Friends of Breastfeeding. Friends of Breastfeeding held the Breastfeeding Challenge on Saturday 30th September at venues around the country to bring as many breastfeeding mothers and babies as possible together at the same time and place.

The Association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland (ALCI) hosted their Annual Conference the weekend prior to National Breastfeeding Week. The conference/training event provided education and professional development opportunities for IBCLCs and other HCPS.

There were over 70 events around the country as part of National Breastfeeding Week including coffee mornings and information sessions hosted by the HSE and voluntary breastfeeding support groups. Media coverage was greater this year than other years with coverage in print media, radio and television. The RTE Today Show featured an item from Inchicore Primary Care Centre on Wednesday 4th October with Brenda Donohue meeting mothers and babies, the public health nurses who provide the Inchicore Breastfeeding Support Group and Lactation Consultants from the Ask our Expert service on www.breastfeeding.ie. This event was also featured on the RTE nine o’clock news on Thursday 5th October.

We would like to thank our colleagues in the HSE Health Promotion & Improvement Division and the Communications Division for helping to make National Breastfeeding Week so successful this year.

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9 [https://www.cuidiu-ict.ie/](https://www.cuidiu-ict.ie/)
10 [https://www.lalecheleagueireland.com/](https://www.lalecheleagueireland.com/)
12 [http://www.alcireland.ie/](http://www.alcireland.ie/)
5. Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

Members of the National Breastfeeding Implementation Group liaised with the Acute Hospital and Primary Care Divisions and the Women and Infants Health Programme to review the current data available on breastfeeding in maternity hospitals/units and in the community.

Hospital data is currently only available to the National Breastfeeding Implementation group via the National Perinatal Reporting System annual reports, which provides overall national figures on a retrospective basis (2015 figures were published in March 2017). The group is working with Women and Infants Programme to enhance the current data available to the programme in order to monitor progress. The KPIs under consideration are:

1. Breastfeeding initiation
2. Breastfeeding on discharge (exclusive)
3. Breastfeeding on discharge (non –exclusive)

A request for two new additional KPIs in the current CHO suite was agreed with the Primary Care Division. The current KPIs include the percentage of babies breastfeeding exclusively and not exclusively at the first PHN visit and the three month PHN developmental check. The proposal is the addition of the KPIs exclusive breastfeeding at the PHN first visit and at the three month development check. These new exclusive breastfeeding metrics will now be included in the CHO KPIs from January 2018. There will not be a requirement for PHNs to collect additional data to support these KPIs as the data is already being collected.

5.1 Monitoring national key performance indicators

The National Breastfeeding Action Plan sets out two overall targets

1. An annual 2% increase in breastfeeding duration rates between 2016 and 2021 (exclusive and not exclusive)
2. 100% of Hospital Groups and Community HealthCare Organisations implementing standardised breastfeeding policies.

Table 1: HSE Breastfeeding Rates and Targets for 2016 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of babies breastfed (exclusively and not exclusively) at 1st PHN visit</th>
<th>HSE Target</th>
<th>Percentage of babies breastfed (exclusively and not exclusively) at 3 month developmental check</th>
<th>HSE Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Table 2: Percentage of babies breastfed (exclusively and not exclusively) at 1st PHN visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHO</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Reached the National Target</th>
<th>Percentage increase/decrease on 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHO 1</td>
<td>44.00%</td>
<td>45.40%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>+3.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 2</td>
<td>54.80%</td>
<td>54.90%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>+0.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 3</td>
<td>52.30%</td>
<td>47.00%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>-10.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 4</td>
<td>65.70%</td>
<td>63.40%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-3.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 5</td>
<td>56.40%</td>
<td>53.50%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>-5.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 6</td>
<td>70.00%</td>
<td>64.80%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-7.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 7</td>
<td>51.90%</td>
<td>52.30%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>+0.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 8</td>
<td>55.70%</td>
<td>49.10%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>-11.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 9</td>
<td>59.80%</td>
<td>58.00%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-3.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National Rate 56.80% 54.50% -4.05%

National Target 2016 = 56% 2017 = 58%

2018 National Target = 60%

Percentage of babies breastfed (exclusively and not exclusively) at 1st PHN visit

- The national target of 58% breastfeeding at the first PHN visit was not reached in 2017. The rate has decreased by 4%, highlighting the concerted action that is required to ensure we meet these targets this year.
- While CHOs 1, 2 and 7 have not reached the national target, the trend is positive with an increase on 2016 rates.
- CHO 3 has seen over a 10% drop in their breastfeeding rate since 2016.
- CHOs 4, 6, and 9 have reached or exceeded the national target for 2017. However all three CHOs have seen drops in their rates.
- CHO 5 is still below the national target and there was a decrease of over 5% in their rate between 2016 and 2017.
- CHO 8 remains below the national target and had the highest percentage decrease (11.85%) in rates of all nine CHOs in 2017.
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Table 3: Percentage of babies breastfed (exclusively and not exclusively) at 3 month developmental check

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHO</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Reached the National Target</th>
<th>Percentage increase/decrease on 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHO 1</td>
<td>24.50%</td>
<td>25.60%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>4.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 2</td>
<td>34.50%</td>
<td>41.00%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>18.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 3</td>
<td>28.30%</td>
<td>27.60%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>-2.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 4</td>
<td>53.70%</td>
<td>50.40%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-6.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 5</td>
<td>39.50%</td>
<td>38.60%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>-2.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 6</td>
<td>48.80%</td>
<td>45.70%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-6.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 7</td>
<td>35.70%</td>
<td>37.30%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>4.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 8</td>
<td>33.70%</td>
<td>32.40%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>-3.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO 9</td>
<td>44.20%</td>
<td>45.40%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Rate</td>
<td>38.80%</td>
<td>38.90%</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National Target

| 2016 = 38% | 2017 = 40% |

2018 National Target = 42%

Percentage of babies breastfed (exclusively and not exclusively) at 3 Month Developmental Check

- While the national target of 40% was not reached in 2017, there was an increase in the overall rate and at 38.9% it represents an improvement (+0.26%) on 2016.
- In 2017 CHOs 2, 4, 6 and 9 reached and exceeded the national target for 2017. However, CHO 4 and 6 saw a decrease of over 6% in their rates on 2016. It is notable that CHO 2 has achieved almost a 19% increase their rates between 2016 and 2017.
- While CHOs 1 and 7 did not achieve the national target, the trend is positive with each CHO achieving an increase of almost 5% in their rates.
- CHO3 and 8 have not achieved the national target and have seen decreases in their rates of 2.47% and 3.86% respectively.
- While CHO 5 saw a decrease in their rate of 2.28% that resulted in the CHO being below target in 2017.
Conclusion

The HSE National Breastfeeding Implementation Group was established to progress the actions that include:

- the implementation of policies at hospital and community level;
- investment in breastfeeding training and skills development for healthcare staff;
- the provision of additional lactation specialist posts;
- partnership working to promote a culture that accepts and supports breastfeeding.

The National Breastfeeding Implementation Group will oversee the implementation of the action plan, annual implementation plans and report on progress, maintaining oversight of the timeframe.

Priority areas have been identified for implementation in 2018, these include

- Investment in breastfeeding training for Healthcare Professionals
- Revised Baby Friendly Initiative standards for maternity services.
- Revised antenatal education standards for maternity services
- Revised HSE Infant Feeding Policy for Maternity and Neonatal Services, and Community Healthcare Organisations.

Without funding key actions cannot be progressed. Funding is required to support key action areas including the appointment of Lactation Consultants in maternity hospitals and CHO areas and for the provision of breast pumps for mothers of preterm and sick infants.

The results from the 2016 and 2017 key performance indicators show that a concerted effort is required across all areas if we are to achieve the targets set out in our action plan.

Further actions are required to ensure that data are available from maternity hospitals/units to support the development of KPIs in order to measure and monitor breastfeeding rates.
Appendix 1: National Breastfeeding Implementation Group

Membership and Terms of Reference

National Breastfeeding Implementation Group membership 2017

- Chair, Dr. Melissa Canny, Public Health Specialist
- Dr. Phil Jennings, DPH/ National Lead for Healthy Childhood Policy Priority Programme
- Carmel Brennan, Programme Manager-National Healthy Childhood Programme
- Janet Gaynor, Functional Manager, Health Promotion & Improvement
- Angela Dunne, Director of Midwifery, National Women and Infants Health Programme
- Cara O’Neill and Denise Curran, CHO Health & Wellbeing Heads of Service
- Margaret O’Neill, National Dietetic advisor
- Sarah O’Brien, Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme Manager.
- Siobhan Hourigan, National Breastfeeding Co-ordinator
- Rebecca O’Donovan, Asst National Breastfeeding Co-ordinator
- Jacinta Egan, Administrative Support, Healthy Childhood Policy Priority Programme

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference of the National Breastfeeding Implementation Group are:

- To develop an implementation plan for the Breastfeeding Action Plan, with agreed timelines
- To oversee the implementation of the Breastfeeding Implementation Plan, and annual project plans.
- To agree priorities for submission to the HSE service plan, and develop appropriate project plans.
- To ensure the Implementation Plan is aligned with relevant strategies and policies
- To monitor National KPIs in relation to breastfeeding
- To consider the potential for the development of further KPIs.
- To continuously monitor and review the progress of implementation of the Action Plan
- To ensure the Implementation Plan is aligned to the standards and requirements of regulatory bodies.
- To ensure Implementation Plan is aligned with other health care professionals and relevant Policy Priority Programmes e.g. HEAL.
- To consult with representatives of relevant bodies or disciplines on an advisory basis, as required.
- To establish an effective communication and reporting mechanisms in relation to the Breastfeeding Implementation Plan within each HSE Division and Policy Priority Programme Programmes.