



Improving the uptake of the Baby Friendly Health Initiative in Australian hospitals.

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Breastfeeding is a normal biological process and protects the health and well-being of mothers and babies. Yet breastfeeding continues to be undervalued by society, and in Australia women face multiple barriers to breastfeeding in the home, community, health care system and workforce.

The Baby Friendly Health Initiative (BFHI), developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1991, was designed to ensure that mothers receive adequate support to initiate breastfeeding and to continue doing so after discharge from the acute care service. In 1995, UNICEF passed the governance within Australia to the Australian College of Midwives (ACM) where it remains today. As of 2020, only 26% of Australian public hospitals have active Baby Friendly accreditation.

Recommendations

The low rates of current accreditation have generally been attributed to the overall low priority that governments, hospitals and the community place on breastfeeding. The value of breastfeeding to society could be improved by:

- Investment in evidence based, free-from-commercial-interest education and support for breastfeeding mothers and family.
- In-hospital training and preservice education aimed at increasing awareness and clinical knowledge of breastfeeding for best practice, and which are appropriately funded by government.
- Integrating BFHI standards to national accreditation standards, and ensuring these are independent of influence from formula companies and their affiliates.
- Continued support for breastfeeding policies in the workplace and community.
- Supporting holistic relationally-based culturally-sensitive breastfeeding programs within primary health care.
- Examining international models of BFHI implementation for feasibility of use in Australia.