

## **A Baby Friendly Aotearoa Programme and updating the NZ Baby Friendly Documents to align with new BFHI operational guide WHO/UNICEF 2018**

Breastfeeding has a positive influence on the health status and social wellbeing of the baby, mother, whānau and community. New Zealand recognises this and the Ministry of Health recommends that infants are exclusively breastfed for their first six months of life. Despite this, and the known risks of not breastfeeding, just nine percent of New Zealand babies are exclusively breastfed during their first half year of life (1). Māori and Pacific peoples, low-income families and young mothers have lower breastfeeding rates than other groups. These discrepancies contribute to poorer child wellbeing and disparities in health status.

The influences on breastfeeding rates are complex. Breastfeeding is a highly emotive subject because so many families have not breastfed, or have experienced the trauma of trying very hard to breastfeed and not succeeding. No parent should have to feel the pain of any implication that they have not done the best for their child, but the NZ context has become fraught and conversations about breastfeeding are polarising.

Powerful new evidence about the benefits of breastfeeding provides a compelling case to alter prevailing attitudes and practices. Ground-breaking research highlights the practical, emotional and cultural barriers that still stand in the way of women breastfeeding (2). This research underlines the importance of breastfeeding in improving health, saving lives and reducing costs for families, communities and New Zealand.

The “10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding” has been revised and released (3). New Zealand needs to align its BFHI and BFCI with these. This alignment, the need to modernise the BFHI and increase the scope of Baby Friendly work has provided the opportunity to create a Baby Friendly Aotearoa (BFA) Programme.

The Ministry of Health has signalled the updating of the National Strategic Plan for Action on Breastfeeding and the New Zealand Baby Friendly Documents are due to be reviewed and relaunched for 2020 so the timing is opportune to do more.

New Zealand’s birthing population is changing. Babies born in New Zealand today are ethnically diverse. New Zealand’s maternity and well child systems are evolving and provide mothers/whānau with the opportunity to birth at home, in community hubs and in primary/secondary/tertiary facilities. The independent LMC model of midwifery care continues to be the cornerstone of maternity services, however, there are significant workforce shortages across the country especially in rural communities.

The provision of Well Child Tamariki Ora (WCTO) and community services for babies and mothers varies across the country with a growth in Māori providers and peer support services. Data capture, IT Tools, education opportunities/modes of delivery and quality assurance requirements have changed since the BFHI was established in 2000. There is also a strong desire for ‘Baby Friendly’ to be pursued as a quality marker supported by continuous approach and that the process adds value to a service.

The proposed BFA Programme will provide a framework for the BFHI and BFCI. It is part of a drive to encourage breastfeeding from birth and sustain breastfeeding for babies and mothers. The Baby Friendly Aotearoa Programme aims to cover more locations than hospitals and support mothers who do not/are unable to breastfeed their babies.

It is time to work collectively and ensure that Baby Friendly Aotearoa contributes to the wider initiatives that will increase breastfeeding rates in New Zealand.

The Ministry of Health and NZBA are jointly leading work to establish the BFA with the input from a panel that brings a range of perspectives to the discussions. These perspectives include consumers, policy makers, analysis, educators, infant feeding experts, DHBs, researchers, midwives, paediatricians, WCTO providers, Māori, Pacifica, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, and neonatal services.

This document contains the basis of the BFA Programme and the impact of the new 10 steps on the New Zealand documents as they relate to BFHI and BFCI.

This document will be used to consult with the sector prior to implementing the BFA Programme and New Zealand's interpretation of the new 10 steps from 2020.

The Ministry of Health and NZBA Board are responsible for signing off the BFA Programme and NZ Baby Friendly Documents 2020.

1. NZ Ministry of Health Data -Breast Feeding Status for Infants at Six Months July-December 2017
2. Breastfeeding series: The Lancet. Volume 387, Issue 10017, January 30, 2016.
3. [http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative -implementation/en/](http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/Baby%20Friendly%20Hospital%20Initiative%20-%20implementation/en/)