

TITLE: Extending the Ontario Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Nutritional Allowance to 24 Months

SPONSOR: Southwestern Public Health

WHEREAS The global public health recommendation is for babies to be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life and thereafter begin iron-rich foods while breastfeeding continues for two years and beyond; and

WHEREAS A key recommendation from the Ontario Healthy Kids Strategy is for children to be breastfed until age two to help protect against obesity; and

WHEREAS While most Ontario mothers plan to breastfeed and initiate breastfeeding, only about 33 percent exclusively breastfed their baby to six months in 2013/14 (Best Start, 2015); and

WHEREAS Ontario women living in neighbourhoods with lower median household incomes, lower levels of educational attainment, and higher levels of unemployment [including mothers receiving social assistance] are more likely to have lower rates of breastfeeding initiation and duration (Best Start, 2015); and

WHEREAS The Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Nutritional Allowance may only be paid to breastfeeding mothers receiving social assistance until the baby reaches 12 months of age; and

WHEREAS Mothers require healthy foods, extra fluids and calories while breastfeeding (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012); and

WHEREAS There are numerous documented nutritional and child health benefits associated with breastfeeding beyond 12 months; and

WHEREAS There are multiple studies showing evidence that a mother's risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, osteoporosis and cardiac disease decrease the longer that they breastfeed; and

WHEREAS Increasing the number of women on social assistance that breastfeed beyond 12 months has the potential to reduce health disparities; and

WHEREAS The Southwestern Ontario Lactation Consultants Group believes that the Breastfeeding Nutritional Allowance should normalize breastfeeding to two years and beyond and align with global infant feeding guidelines;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA) support the advocacy letter written by the Southwestern Ontario Lactation Consultants Group and call upon the Ministry of Community and Social Services to extend the Ontario Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Nutritional Allowance from 12 months to at least 24 months while breastfeeding.

AND FURTHER that ALPHA recommend that the Ministry of Community and Social Services:

1. Increase the Pregnancy/Breastfeeding allowance (Ontario Works Directive 6.5 and Ontario Disability Support Program Directive 6.5) to \$145/month (\$162/month if mother or infant is lactose intolerant) for the first 12 months of life to align with the Special Diet Allowance (Ontario Works Directive 6.6 and Ontario Disability Support Program Directive 6.4), which is provided to formula feeding mothers, for the first 12 months of life; and
2. Provide a \$40/month Special Diet Allowance for formula feeding mothers from 12 to 24 months of age; and
3. Remove the requirement for mothers to disclose and have a health professional sign off on their chosen feeding method in order to be eligible to receive the income allowance.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE:

Resolution CARRIED AS AMENDED

Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services
80 Grosvenor St., Hepburn Block, 6th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 1E9

July 11, 2016

To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing this letter on behalf of the Southwestern Ontario Lactation Consultants Group with representation from Hospitals, Public Health Units, Private Practice Lactation Consultants and Breastfeeding Peer Support Leaders from the Southwest Region. It was recently brought to our attention that breastfeeding mothers can only receive the Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Nutritional Allowance until their baby is 12 months of age. We are formally requesting the Ministry of Community and Social Services extend the Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Nutritional Allowance until children are at least 2 years of age.

As a global public health recommendation, babies should be exclusively breastfed until 6 months of age. Thereafter it is recommended that they continue to breastfeed for up to two years and beyond with the addition of iron-rich complementary foods. (Health Canada, 2012; Pound, Unger, Canadian Paediatric Society & Nutrition and Gastroenterology Committee, 2012; World Health Organization [WHO] & United Nation Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2003). Despite this recommendation, the majority of Canadian mothers discontinue breastfeeding well before 2 years. In fact, Ontario women living in neighborhoods with lower median household incomes, lower levels of educational attainment, and higher levels of unemployment, are less likely to breastfeed exclusively at discharge from hospital (BORN, 2015) and are more likely to have lower rates of breastfeeding initiation and duration (Best Start Resource Centre, 2015).

Breastfeeding should be supported and promoted in these vulnerable populations, which include women who receive social assistance from Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program. A continued Breastfeeding Nutritional Allowance until children are at least 2 years of age would establish that the Ministry of Community and Social Services supports global infant feeding guidelines and would help to normalize breastfeeding to 2 years and beyond, regardless of income level. Furthermore, supporting women that receive social assistance to continue to breastfeed could potentially reduce health disparities because their families may experience some of the documented benefits of breastfeeding after 12 months of age.

Research conducted on toddlers who are breastfed indicates that there are many nutritional benefits associated with continued breastfeeding. Human milk expressed after one year of age has been found to have significantly more fat and energy content than earlier milk (Mandel, Lubetzky, Dollberg, Barak, & Mimouni, 2005). Human milk in the second year postpartum has also been shown to have substantial amounts of protein and most vitamins (Dewey, 2001).

Breastfeeding beyond 12 months has demonstrated many positive health effects for children and their mothers. Breastfeeding toddlers between the ages of 1 and 3 years have been found to have fewer illnesses, illnesses of shorter duration, and lower mortality rates (Molbak et al., 1994; van den Bogaard et al., 1991; Gulick 1986). Children who are weaned from breastfeeding before 2 years of age are at a higher risk of illness (American Academy of Family Medicine, 2016). Recent research has also shown that human milk in the second year postpartum contains significantly higher concentrations of immune factors such as lactoferrin, lysozyme and Immunoglobulin A (Perrin, Fogleman, Newburg, & Allen, 2016). Additionally, there are multiple studies showing evidence that a mother's risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, osteoporosis and cardiac disease decrease the longer that they breastfeed their children.

In conclusion, support for women to continue breastfeeding for at least 2 years, particularly vulnerable populations receiving social assistance, is imperative. The numerous nutritional and health benefits of breastfeeding to 2 years and beyond cannot be denied. A small amount of continued financial support for breastfeeding women would not only help them to meet their caloric needs while breastfeeding, but would also support breastfeeding into toddlerhood as the normal way of feeding. The Southwestern Ontario Lactation Consultants group urges the Ministry of Community and Social Services to extend the Nutritional Allowance while mothers are breastfeeding until children are at least 2 years of age.

Sincerely,

Members of the Southwestern Ontario Lactation Consultants Group

With representation from:

Elgin St. Thomas Public Health

Huron County Health Unit

Approvals from other organizations pending

References

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