

# Loudoun County Responds to Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding

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## Summary

Rates of breastfeeding duration and exclusivity are major public health imperatives, with long-term consequences manifesting in the forms of obesity and chronic disease. We need to achieve and surpass the Healthy People 2020 objectives of increasing the proportion of infants who are exclusively breastfed through 6 months from 14.1% to 25.5% and increasing the proportion of employers with worksite lactation support programs from 25% to 38%. By assisting employers in developing clear breastfeeding policies, making the policies easily accessible, and creating spaces where mothers can express breastmilk, it is possible to boost these indicators.

## Challenge

Exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months is associated with a lower risk of many childhood illnesses and chronic diseases including obesity. In Virginia, 81% of mothers initiate breastfeeding, but by 6 months rates of exclusive breastfeeding drop to 22%. The reasons for many mothers' being unable to reach their prenatal breastfeeding goals are likely multi-factorial. One of the recognized factors is employer support of breastfeeding. Without policies and systems in place to support a mother when she returns to work, it may be a challenge for her to reach her breastfeeding goals. Lactation support policies and programs have been shown to improve duration of breastfeeding and to have 3:1 return on investment for businesses, including lower rates of absenteeism due to infant illness, lower health insurance costs and higher employee retention.

## Solution

Our goal is to provide employers in the county with the knowledge, tools, and expertise to implement lactation support policies in their workplaces. Our strategy included creating a toolkit based on Health and Human Services "Business Case for Breastfeeding" and presenting the materials at events targeting human resource managers and business owners. The second piece of the strategy is to target a few large employers to assist them in fully implementing a lactation support program, and thus serve as models for other employers in the county.



## Your Involvement is Key

**To make these changes in your community: learn about best practice Lactation Support Programs through the Health and Human Services' ["Business Case for Breastfeeding"](#); partner with your local Chamber of Commerce and Society for Human Resource Management; engage with your local breastfeeding coalition and other champions such as professional organizations and health departments; reach out to high-impact businesses and government agencies that can serve as models for other businesses; and spread success through media and social media.**

## Results

Through the Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers and Children grant, our team, led by Dr. Janine Rethy, developed a comprehensive Lactation Support Program at the Loudoun County Government, which employs approximately 700 women of child-bearing age. A Lactation Support Policy was implemented July 1, 2016, brochures and a page on the county's website were created to explain the benefits, and human resource liaisons were trained on how to administer the policy in their departments. Working with Human Resources, General Services, Cigna Health Insurance, and with the help of funds from the CPHMC grant, two nursing mothers' lounges were established and outfitted with educational materials to support breastfeeding. These policy, systems, and environmental changes were celebrated with a ribbon cutting in August with the attendance of local dignitaries and the Virginia Department of Health's State Breastfeeding Coordinator. The event received wide coverage in the media.

### Contact

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*"Without the space and the support of County Administration and Human Resources, I'm certain I would have needed to switch to formula many months ago, despite my personal goal to nurse until my son's first birthday."*

**- Lauren Murphy, a Loudoun County Government employee and working mom**

## Sustainable Success

To expand the Loudoun County successes beyond our target community and integrate them into a larger picture of breastfeeding support and acceptance throughout Virginia and the US workforce, we will continue to encourage and assist other businesses to implement programs. We will build on our work with the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, the Society for Human Resource Managers, and Virginia Department of Health's State Breastfeeding Coordinator. Another consideration for sustainability is to track and report on data that shows the long-term benefits to employers: such as lower employee turnover and lower absenteeism. The increased awareness of the benefits of having a lactation support program will help make breastfeeding policies in the workplace more the norm.