World Health Transformed Through Breastfeeding and Skilled Lactation Care

international lactation consultant association®

Why Is Breastfeeding Important?

Breastfeeding contributes to important health outcomes across high-income and low-income settings alike, including:

Infant and Child
Protection from infection, disease, mortality, malnutrition, and later obesity

Maternal
Decreased risk of reproductive cancers, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease

"The scaling up of breastfeeding to a near universal level could prevent 823,000 annual deaths in children younger than 5 years and 20,000 annual deaths from breast cancer."

Lancet breastfeeding series, 2016 and 2023

How Can Countries Improve Breastfeeding Rates?

1. Legislate, monitor, and enforce the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, and all subsequent, relevant WHA resolutions
2. Implement the Ten Steps of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI)
3. Invest in skilled lactation care (education, training, services) to support mothers

How Does Investment in Skilled Lactation Care Help?

Research shows that breastfeeding counselling is one of the key interventions to improve breastfeeding rates. Recommendations for breastfeeding counselling best practice include:

- Counselling is accessible by all pregnant women and mothers with young children, starting antenatally and up to two years after birth or longer, with at least six counselling sessions.
- Counselling is provided by appropriately trained healthcare professionals and community-based lay and peer breastfeeding counsellors.
- Counselling provides anticipatory guidance on challenges in addition to establishing skills, competencies, and confidence among mothers.

Investing in skilled lactation care and services enables families to reach their breastfeeding goals, which improves breastfeeding rates and health outcomes.

Guideline: counselling of women to improve breastfeeding practices. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018

About ILCA®

ILCA® is the member association for International Board Certified Lactation Consultants® (IBCLC®) and other skilled lactation care providers and breastfeeding supporters. ILCA supports breastfeeding and skilled lactation care through:

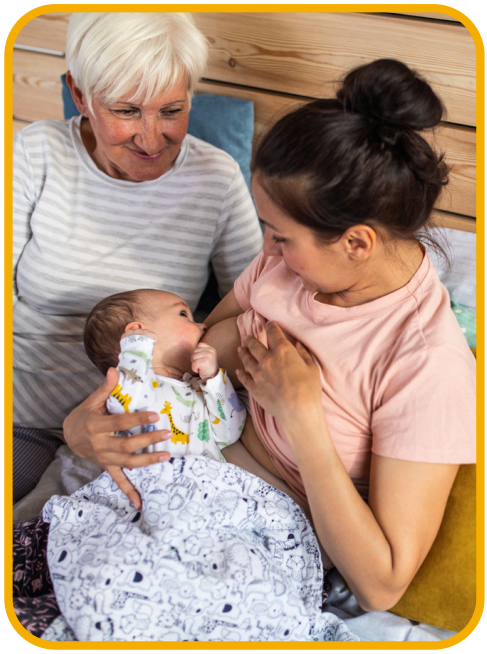
- Journal of Human Lactation, the premier research journal on lactation issues
- World-class education, including conferences and webinars
- *Clinical Guidelines for the Establishment of Exclusive Breastfeeding, Fourth Edition*
- Advocacy, including for implementation of the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* and the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative; ILCA is a partner in the Global Breastfeeding Collective and works with many international and national organizations

ILCA welcomes all who support, promote and protect breastfeeding. Learn more about ILCA, membership, and other ways to engage.

What Is Skilled Lactation Care?

Health workers educated in breastfeeding counselling skills who work with families to help them reach their breastfeeding goals and overcome any challenges. The different roles and levels of training provide a range of services that families may need:

- **Peer supporters** have lived experience with breastfeeding and have received training to provide support.
- **Breastfeeding counsellors** (also lived experience practitioners) and **community health workers** have more extensive training and are able to support common challenges.
- **Lactation consultants**, such as International Board Certified Lactation Consultants® (IBCLCs®), are specialists in the clinical management of breastfeeding and lactation, with extensive education (90+ hours of lactation specific education, plus basic education in the health sciences) and training (300-1,000 hours of supervised practice). They can assist women and families with common and complex breastfeeding challenges. Additionally, they can train other providers, help with policy development, and more.
- **Some healthcare providers** (physicians, midwives, nurses) also have training in breastfeeding support, such as through BFHI.



International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners® and IBLCE® are registered Service Marks, and International Board Certified Lactation Consultant® and IBCLC® are registered Certification Marks, of the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners and are used with permission herein.

international lactation consultant association®