



RNAO

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

RESOLUTION #7 Baby Friendly™ Initiative

Submitted by:

Childbirth Nurses Interest Group (CNIG),
Community Health Nurses' Initiatives Group (CHNIG), and
Pediatric Nurses Interest Group (PedNIG)

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WHEREAS RNAO endorses the WHO/UNICEF and Health Canada's recommendations for exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months as well as the WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly™ Initiative (BFI), and

WHEREAS the 1997 Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines set the objective of increasing the percentage of infants breastfed up to six months of age to 50% by the year 2010 but in 2003 only 39.4% of women in Ontario breastfed their infants for 6 months and only 20.2% exclusively breastfed at this age, and

WHEREAS despite the success of BFI in thousands of communities worldwide, there are only 6 BFI designated health facilities in Canada and only one of these in Ontario, and

WHEREAS the Ontario Breastfeeding Committee (OBC) is recognized as the authority for the BFI in Ontario,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that RNAO collaborate with the Ontario Breastfeeding Committee (OBC) to lobby the Ontario Government including the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, the Ministry of Health Promotion and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to:

1. support the implementation of the Baby Friendly™ Initiative (BFI) in Ontario hospitals, public health units and other community health services.
2. include the BFI in the revision of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines.

Backgrounder

Canada, the *World Health Organization* and nations around the world acknowledge that breastfeeding is the unequalled way of providing food and immunologic protection for the health of infants, with significant health and economic benefits for mothers, families and society. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months with the introduction of appropriate complementary foods and continued breastfeeding to two years and beyond. While breastfeeding initiation rates in Canada and Ontario have climbed to 80-90%, these drop off quickly with only 20% of infants being exclusively breastfed at 6 months. Successful breastfeeding requires active support and protection from preconception through pregnancy, birth, the postnatal period and infancy.

RNAO's policies, including the *Breastfeeding BPG*, *Breastfeeding Policy Statement*, *Sponsorship and Advertising Policies* and *Prevention of Childhood Obesity BPG* endorse the above position, as well as the WHO/UNICEF *Baby Friendly™ Initiative (BFI)* – an evidence-based global program to support breastfeeding as a key component of maternity and community health services.

The *Baby Friendly™ Initiative* is an evidence-based set of standards outlined in the *WHO/UNICEF Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*, the *WHO/UNICEF International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* and, the *BFI in Community Health Services: A Canadian Implementation Guide*.. The principles of *BFI* promote exclusive and sustained breastfeeding as a health decision for both the child and the mother. Key elements include informed choice, public and professional education, policies to maintain close mother-infant contact, early, frequent, exclusive and unrestricted breastfeeding and ongoing support through community services.

The *BFI* has been disseminated around the world involving thousands of maternity facilities which have official *BFI* designation. Studies show that babies born in *BFI* facilities breastfed at an increased rate, duration and degree compared with those born in non-*BFI* facilities. Despite Health Canada's endorsement of *BFI*, only 6 health facilities in Canada, and just one in Ontario, have achieved *BFI* designation. In addition, significant declines in community support services in Ontario – witness recent closures of community breastfeeding clinics – accentuate the barriers to sustained breastfeeding in our province.

Implementation of *BFI* is a voluntary, self-directed process in which health facilities are assisted to work towards the standards outlined in the *BFI Practice Outcome Indicators* and to engage in an external assessment process, when ready. The *Ontario Breastfeeding Committee (OBC)*, in partnership with the *Breastfeeding Committee for Canada (BCC)*, oversees and facilitates the implementation of the WHO/ UNICEF *Baby Friendly™ Hospital Initiative* in Ontario.

Quebec, where the government provides official and financial support for *BFI*, has 5 of Canada's 6 *BFI* designated facilities. New Brunswick has recently adopted *BFI* as part of its *Wellness Strategy* to improve breastfeeding rates and infant, child and family health in that province.

In 1997, the Ontario Ministry of Health set targets for improving the rates and duration of breastfeeding recommending enhancement of breastfeeding knowledge and skills of professionals and the provision of a range of community breastfeeding support services. These targets have not been reached. The recommended approaches in the ministry objectives are key elements of *BFI*.

This resolution seeks to join the RNAO resources and skills in lobbying the government with those of the *OBC* towards the implementation of *BFI* in Ontario health facilities, public health units and other community health services for the promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding as a key health initiative.

This resolution is brought forward by 3 RNAO Interest Groups – the *Childbirth Nurses Interest Group*, the *Community Health Nurses Initiatives Group* and the *Pediatric Nurses Interest Group*. The resolution has been prepared in consultation with the *Ontario Breastfeeding Committee* and the *Breastfeeding Committee for Canada* and has received official support from the *Ontario Public Health Association*.

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