

Breastfeeding and Lactation in the Workplace

AWHONN supports legislation and initiatives that promote and protect breastfeeding and lactation in the workplace.

The association supports legislation and policies that encourage employers to address return to work issues. Specifically, AWHONN supports:

- ◆ Provision of tax credits to employers facilitating lactation in the workplace;
- ◆ Breaks for the breastfeeding employee to use a private, safe and clean area for breastfeeding or milk expression;
- ◆ Expansion of WIC's breastfeeding promotion program;
- ◆ Reimbursement by health plans for breastfeeding services and supplies including the rental or purchase of hospital grade breast pumps and the services of a certified lactation consultant.

AWHONN supports the expansion of education programs to teach women successful maintenance of breastfeeding on returning to work outside the home.

Background: Currently, working women in the United States are significant contributors to the workforce. Approximately 55 percent of working women provide half or more of their family's household income. Women aged 20-44 comprise 74 percent of the workforce.

Healthy People 2010 has set a goal for the United States to have at least 75% of mothers exclusively or partially breastfeed their infants during the early postpartum period with 50% continuing for 5-6 months. In 1996, 59% of newborns were breastfed during the early postpartum period and 37% were breastfeeding at 5-6 months of age. AWHONN believes support of breastfeeding in the work place will contribute significantly to achieving the Healthy People 2010 goals.

- ◆ Breast milk is the optimal nutrition for infants, providing a complete nutritional balance as well as much needed immunity. Studies indicate that breastfed infants have lower incidence of ear infections, respiratory infections and other diseases. Some studies even indicate that there are cognitive benefits for the breastfed infant.
- ◆ Breastfeeding has been shown to decrease parental absences from work.
- ◆ Women who breastfeed have been shown to have a decrease in the incidence of osteoporosis and a reduced risk of ovarian and premenopausal breast cancer.

- ◆ Breast milk is a cost-effective form of infant nutrition. Even taking into account the added calories a breastfeeding mother needs to consume, formula costs are high. Infant formula is a 1.6 billion-dollar a year market. The WIC program spends approximately \$500 million a year on formula and accounts for around 40% of the formula sold in the United States.
- ◆ Breastfeeding is estimated to reduce health care expenditures. Kaiser-Permanente found that infants who were breastfed for a minimum of 6 months created an average \$1,400 reduction in health care claims over the first year of life than formula fed infants. The average breastfed infant's Medicaid expenditures are 21% less than the formula fed infant.

Approved by the AWHONN Board of Directors, June 1999