South Australian Breastfeeding Program

Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Breastfeeding is a major determinant of child health, and protects the health of both mothers and babies. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months has positive health impacts for mothers and babies, and the longer the duration of breastfeeding, the greater its positive effects.

The SA Breastfeeding Program (SABP), hosted by the Centre for Health Promotion (CHP), Community Health Division, Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service (CYWHS), works with key stakeholders, employing multi-faceted, long-term strategies to promote breastfeeding at a statewide level. The SABP Strategic and Action Plan 2007 – 2012 (SABPSAP) (Children Youth and Women's Health Service 2007) aims to increase initiation of breastfeeding to more than 90%, and the proportion of babies breastfed at 6 months to 80%. It also aims to increase breastfeeding rates for groups that are less likely to breastfeed (low income women, Aboriginal women in urbanised areas and women aged 18-29 years).

The South Australian Community Health Research Unit (SACHRU) was contracted to evaluate a range of strategies of the SABPSAP.

1. Evaluation of seven performance measures for the program’s overarching goal: To increase the percentage of South Australian babies who are fully breastfed at every age from birth to six months and then to twelve months of age (with the addition of appropriate solids at approximately six months) in line with National Health and Medical Research Council recommendations. This is to be achieved by:
   1. increasing the capacity of hospitals, health services, health professionals and volunteer organisations to provide best practice breastfeeding services; and
   2. increasing community acceptance of breastfeeding as the cultural norm for South Australian babies.

2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of two programs funded by the SABP and delivered by the Australian Breastfeeding Association:
   - Breastfeeding Welcome Here
   - Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation.

To evaluate these broad-based measures, SACHRU employed a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys, interviews and focus groups. The evaluation found that several of the seven performance measures met or exceeded targets:

- percentage of births in Baby Friendly Health Initiative (BFHI) hospitals;
- numbers of registrations in the Baby Friendly e-Learning Program;
- Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation program in SA.

Evaluators noted an ongoing positive influence on community attitudes from the 2007-9 public campaign Breastfeeding every month is a bonus. Also noteworthy was the confidence and breastfeeding knowledge of young Aboriginal mothers who attended a peer support group and community health clinic that provided information and support for breastfeeding.
The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) also emerged from the consultations associated with this evaluation as a valuable source of support and expertise on breastfeeding.

The lack of uniform data collection and uniform definitions of breastfeeding in Australia and SA meant that the evaluation could not accurately identify SA breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge and at 6 months after birth. However it is expected that these issues will be addressed nationally via the Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2010-2015.

A range of community attitudes to breastfeeding were identified, as well as significant influences on mothers’ decisions to breastfeed and/or their success in breastfeeding. These included:

- Significance of family and friends
- Key role of education and information
- Inconsistent and unhelpful responses from health professionals
- Duration of breastfeeding
- Breastfeeding in public
- Campaign and media messages
- The emotional and contested context of breastfeeding

Misinformation about alcohol and breastfeeding identified in focus groups was linked to a negative impact on breastfeeding duration, and demonstrates the need for consistent and clear public health messages about the safe use of alcohol while breastfeeding.

There were some unanticipated trends identified also. The evaluation revealed some hostility towards women who breastfeed, especially when they persevere through difficulties. Community attitudes were also identified that are unsupportive of mothers’ capacity to make informed choices about feeding their babies.

Two programs administered by the ABA nationally and in receipt of extra funding through the SABP were found to be achieving well.

*Breastfeeding Welcome Here* (BWH) depends predominantly on volunteers, which enables significantly expanded “reach” into communities at minimal cost. Benefits of BWH were found to be increased comfort for women who breastfeed, and community acceptance and support for breastfeeding. Many commented on the win/win aspect of the program, which promotes both breastfeeding and their business.

The *Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation* program (BFWA) is a consultancy service for employers, which facilitates breastfeeding in the workplace. Fourteen workplaces are accredited in SA, mostly government departments and agencies. BFWA survey respondents reported an increase in retention of women employees, and believed that the program enabled women to continue breastfeeding while returning to work earlier.

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