



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local Health Unit First to Receive WHO / UNICEF Designation

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit has become the first Community Health Service in Ontario to receive designation as a "Baby Friendly Community Health Service" by the World Health Organization / United Nations Children's Fund.

The announcement comes after several years of advocacy, education and policy development on the part of the organization. The Breastfeeding Committee for Canada, national authority for the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFI, granted the designation on behalf of UNICEF on June 9, 2006. It carries international standing.

We have led the way for Ontario's Health Units to meet a gold standard of care for breastfeeding families," explains Lorraine Repo, Manager of the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children programs at the Thunder Bay District Health Unit. "We are thrilled to be part of this global campaign to improve the quality of care for all new mothers."

WHO/UNICEF launched the BFHI in 1991 to provide assessment and accreditation criteria for excellent maternity care that protects, promotes and supports breastfeeding. This recognizes that breastfeeding is important in the long-term health outcomes and disease prevention of mothers and babies. This standard is applied to both developing and industrialized nations. Worldwide there are more than 16,000 Baby Friendly Hospitals.

In Canada, the BFI was launched in 1998. The Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) has designations in two categories: Hospitals and Community Health Services. So far there are only six other Canadian facilities that hold the designation, all in Quebec except one hospital in Hamilton Ontario.

The College of Family Physicians of Canada endorsed the BFI the same year it was launched internationally. Provincial Health strategies in Quebec, British Columbia, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have since moved to identify the attainment of BFHI designation as part of their policy and have provided funding for this goal. In February of this year, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario endorsed the WHO/UNICEF and Health Canada's recommendations for exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. In addition, they supported asking the province to support the implementation of the Baby Friendly™ Initiative (BFI) in Ontario hospitals, public health units and other community health services.

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WHO / UNICEF Designation cont'd

Staff at Baby Friendly facilities have received education and clinical mentoring to ensure high practice standards that meet the UNICEF criteria. Trained assessors determine whether the outcomes stipulated by the UNICEF criteria are in evidence through a rigorous assessment process involving interviews with clients and staff, meticulous observation of practices and the practice environment, and scrutiny of all documentation, including policies, procedures and protocols.

The presentation of official documentation and a celebration will take place in September.

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Attached Background – “Who Benefits from the Baby-Friendly Initiative™?”

Who Benefits from the Baby Friendly Initiative™?

The woman and her child

- Consistent care, information and advice. Staff in maternity and pediatric units have a written policy, which they understand and follow.
- Consistent and skilled help with breastfeeding. Staff are required to be able to support women who wish to breastfeed.
- Early initiation of breastfeeding. Babies are not unnecessarily removed from mothers at birth, thereby encouraging the instinctive seeking and suckling behaviours. When mother and baby need to be separated the mother is helped with expressing her milk and the expressed milk is given to the baby.
- Mother's milk is valued. No food or drink other than breastmilk is given.
- Breastfeeding is valued. Artificial nipples and soothers are avoided.
- Empowerment. The woman has authority for her own resource, breastfeeding.

Those who care for mothers and babies

- Increased knowledge, as evidence for the Global Hospital Assessment Criteria becomes better understood.
- Increased skills. Staff are committed to the support of breastfeeding mothers and their babies, even the difficult ones.
- Increased professional competence, as practices are investigated and challenged, and changes are made.
- A new respect for the woman, the baby, and their ability to breastfeed when given appropriate support. The midwife/nurse is "with woman", rather than providing nursing management of a disease.
- As the care becomes "woman-centred" rather than "task-centred", all staff respect the woman's need for consistent advice and empowerment, thereby increasing cooperation and collaboration between different staff members.

The family

- Health and development of infant.
- Health of mother.
- Cost saving, immediate and long term, breastfeeding is the "Best Investment" a family can make.