

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**DECEMBER 10, 2015**

**Contact:**

Sarah Diaz  
California WIC Association  
530.276.1388 or 530.750.2280  
[sdiaz@calwic.org](mailto:sdiaz@calwic.org)



Robbie Gonzalez-Dow  
California Breastfeeding Coalition  
831.917.8939  
[Robbiegd.cbc@gmail.com](mailto:Robbiegd.cbc@gmail.com)



## **HOSPITALS MEETING ONGOING CHALLENGES TO SUPPORT THE BREASTFEEDING GOALS OF NEW MOTHERS**

Sacramento, CA –

According to state and county fact sheets released today, hospital breastfeeding rates have increased by 10% since 2010, benefiting tens of thousands of mothers and babies. The fact sheets, *Meeting Challenges, Managing Change*, co-authored by California WIC Association (CWA) and UC Davis Human Lactation Center, show that more California hospitals have adopted comprehensive breastfeeding policies as part of their maternity care.

These 2014 data also show that substantial improvements have been made among ethnic groups that historically have the lowest breastfeeding rates. Over the last four years, California maternity hospitals have seen breastfeeding rates increase by 10% overall (representing more than 43,500 mothers) with the highest increases seen among Hispanic mothers (13.4%), African American mothers (10.2%), and Pacific Islander mothers (10%).

However, despite this progress, a stubborn gap remains. While nearly 94% of California women initiate breastfeeding, 29% of them end up feeding their babies formula during their hospital stays, particularly in hospitals serving low-income mothers and babies. Positive and long-lasting health protections are strongest when breastfeeding is exclusive – babies receive no foods or fluids other than breastmilk – and continuous for the first six months of life.

“Changes in California hospitals have resulted in significant increases in exclusive breastfeeding in hospitals all across the state. The supportive policies and practices that have been implemented ensure that mothers of all income levels and ethnicities have opportunities to ask more questions, get skilled support, and practice feeding during the hospital stay. These policy improvements are intentional. State and local agencies, hospitals, advocates and others have worked together successfully to create and sustain the changes needed,” stated Jane Heinig, PhD, IBCLC, Executive Director, UC Davis Human Lactation Center and author of the fact sheets.

Five Kaiser hospitals, including Walnut Creek, Oakland, San Francisco, Fresno and Santa Rosa, are among the top 15 hospitals in the state with high exclusive breastfeeding rates. Hospitals in 12 counties were on the top list including Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, Woodland Memorial Hospital, UC San Francisco/Moffitt, El Camino Hospital in Santa Clara County, and Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital, Nevada City.

Unfortunately, not all hospitals have made similar progress, including many that serve California's poorest women and infants. Southern California hospitals dominate the list of the 15 lowest performing hospitals, including Garfield Medical Center, Whittier Hospital, Monterey Park Hospital, California Hospital Medical Center, and Methodist Hospital of Southern California, all located in Los Angeles. Other hospitals in the lowest scoring 15 are located in Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Sutter and Kern counties. While all of the lowest-scoring hospitals have low exclusive breastfeeding rates, three of the hospitals on the list (Memorial Hospital of Gardena, Monterey Park Hospital, Garfield Medical Center, and Kern Medical Center) have made significant progress in improving their policies and practices, resulting in exclusive breastfeeding rates 2-9 times higher than their rates in 2010. Since 2010, the gap between the breastfeeding rates of the highest and lowest ranked hospitals in California has narrowed (though it still remains 45% to 78% lower than those of this year's higher performing hospitals), and in some cases is even approaching the state average, which speaks to the hard work they have been doing to support and educate mothers who give birth at their facilities.

"It is so important for hospitals to continue making improvements in maternity policies and practices so that the gap in disparities narrows even further. Moms and babies deserve the best support to be successful with their breastfeeding experience no matter where they deliver in California," said Robbie Gonzalez-Dow, Executive Director of the California Breastfeeding Coalition.

Breastfeeding success is often dependent on the support of hospital staff during those first critical 24 to 72 hours after delivery, especially for mothers facing early challenges. Support from hospital staff, evidence-based standards of care, and stronger hospital policies play important roles in determining if a mother will continue to exclusively breastfeed her baby when the family goes home. The data bear out the positive impact when hospitals implement comprehensive policies.

Historic legislation passed in 2013, [SB 402](#), authored by Senators Kevin De León (D-LA) and Fran Pavley (D-Santa Monica), will require hospitals to adopt comprehensive policies for breastfeeding support, achieving Baby Friendly designation or utilizing an alternative set of evidence-based policies, by 2025; the number of Baby-Friendly hospitals in California has climbed steadily from only 12 in 2006 to 78 in November 2015. A companion bill, [SB 502](#), became effective in January of this year and requires all hospitals to develop and disseminate infant feeding policies supporting breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding support for mothers after discharge is also critically needed to help all mothers reach their breastfeeding goals. Evidence shows that when hospitals, medical centers, and public health agencies like WIC work collaboratively, breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusivity rates improve in the community as a whole.

###

Editor's Note:

To view the report online, please go to: <http://bit.ly/CWA2015HospitalFactSheets> or contact Sarah Diaz [sdiaz@calwic.org](mailto:sdiaz@calwic.org) or (530) 750-2280. Local spokespeople are available to discuss this issue throughout California; to receive a list of local spokespeople, please contact Sarah Diaz.