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Summary Report
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Canada

***Breastfeeding attitudes, perceptions and practices in
Labrador***

Labrador: Breastfeeding: attitudes, perceptions and practices

The first cycle, conducted in 1998, focussed on attitudes, perceptions and practices of breastfeeding across Labrador. Public Health staff have worked with clients and other service providers on the promotion of breastfeeding, early identification of expectant women and prenatal education options. A large portion of public health resources is directed to providing services to expectant and post partum families. The emphasis on improving outcomes for this group is consistent with an “investing in health” approach, anticipating that support directed at children ages 0-6 and their families will have measurable, significant and positive impact in later life.

Evidence: A total of 1,647 people in Labrador West, Central Labrador and the coastal communities of Cartwright and Black Tickle participated in the baseline survey. Males comprised 29% of the respondents. A total of 1019 adults and 618 teenagers were interviewed. Information on infant feeding practices was given by 575 mothers of all ages across Labrador, with data on infant feeding practices of 374 children under 10 years of age. Physicians, clinical, regional and public health nurses gave input through self administered questionnaires. Parents across the region gave input on preliminary data in focus groups to develop solutions for action.

Key findings of the cycle were the following:

Attitudes and perceptions:

- Over 80% (806/995) of adult respondents, and 83% of teenage respondents said that breast milk is the best food for a baby.
- 79% (1280/1612) of those surveyed knew about the health benefits of breastfeeding for a mother.
- 69% (1107/1597) stated that they had breastfed or intended to breastfeed their children.
- A person who was breastfed as a baby is three times more likely to want to breastfeed his/her child than one who was not breastfed (odds ratio 3.0, 95% CI 1.8-3.9).

Infant feeding practices:

- Four out of every ten babies in Labrador were not breastfed at birth (148/374)
- A quarter (26%, 55/211) of breastfed infants were given something other than breast milk within the first week after birth.
- One third of the infants who started breastfeeding (33%, 146/222) had stopped breastfeeding altogether by four months of age. By this time, nearly two thirds of these babies (31%, 69/222) were receiving solid supplements.
- Over half of the mothers (53%, 58/109) with children under 10 years of age had received free formula/formula samples from a hospital or clinic.

- The average cost per week reported by mothers who had breastfed their babies for at least part of the first six months was \$21.05. This was almost half the amount estimated by mothers who had never breastfed their babies, \$40.45.

Promoting breastfeeding in the region:

- A quarter (23%, 222/947) of men and women interviewed stated that embarrassment, shyness and social discomfort with breastfeeding was the main reason some women don't breastfeed. 22% (165/488) of mothers said that their employment conditions discourage breastfeeding.
- 78% (166/214) said that they had enough time to establish a breastfeeding pattern in hospital
- 84% (244/289) of the mothers with children under 10 said that their partner was supportive of breastfeeding.
- A woman whose partner was supportive of breastfeeding was 10 times more likely to breastfeed than one whose partner was not supportive (odds ratio 9.9, 95% CI 3.3-29.6).

Planning: Information on the cycle was communicated throughout the cycle via press releases, newspaper articles and radio interviews. At the end of the fieldwork, a meeting with all public health staff in the region was held in North West River, Labrador in which preliminary results were presented and next steps discussed. The suggestions for monitoring feeding practices in Labrador and staff education about the issue will be followed up in the coming months through on-going discussion with staff and community groups.

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