



Advancing Breastfeeding in Colorado: FY19-21 Comprehensive Report

Project Description

Title: Advancing Breastfeeding in Colorado (ABC)

Strategy: Policy and Environmental Change, Breastfeeding

Award: \$682,500 annually (\$2,047,500 total for FY19-21)

Geography: Statewide; support for organizations and individuals across 36 counties to date

ABC is a regional collaboration to improve family health and increase lactation support, especially for low-income families and communities of color, by reducing barriers and fostering breastfeeding-friendly (BFF) environments across Colorado. The ABC team works with local and regional partners to create a seamless system of culturally relevant support, effect policy change, and develop breastfeeding-friendly environments.

The ABC team is comprised of dedicated staff within ABC's local public health agency (LPHA) partners — Boulder, Denver, Jefferson, and Tri-County — who work with organizations in their respective jurisdictions. An additional Durango-based ABC team member provides statewide support and connection outside of those counties. The Colorado Health Institute (CHI) convenes the ABC team and provides financial management, policy insights, thought partnership, and evaluation support.

While LPHAs have long supported lactation, the ABC's collaborative structure allowed for the sharing of a unified assessment/toolkit and model for BFF environments. It also created capacity for team members to work together to assist organizations that cross county lines, such as school districts, health systems, and libraries. Sharing resources and policies, along with having a backbone organization to support frequent meetings and communication, has allowed the team to work more efficiently and effectively while strengthening tailored local approaches.

Key deliverables for the project include: increasing the number of and supporting the continuing capacity of environments with breastfeeding policies and practices, in businesses, public spaces, child care programs, and medical offices; building capacity in the community through working with local coalitions or workgroups and providing access to high-quality, culturally appropriate, and effective breastfeeding education/resources; and continuous evaluation of the team's activities.

Through the support of ABC, community partners have implemented policies including:

- Both organizational- and municipal-level policies providing time and space for milk expression.
- Optimal practices to support families' lactation goals, knowing that at least 90% of Colorado parents desire to breastfeed/chestfeed.
- A stronger adherence to the Workplace Accommodation for Nursing Mother's Act, the state lactation policy. Often community partners are unaware of the state rule and how to support employees until ABC partners with them.



Advancing Breastfeeding in Colorado

Grant Accomplishments

The ABC team is incredibly proud of its collective accomplishments over the past three years. ABC has exceeded many grant targets by working collaboratively as a regional partnership and by supporting local expertise and networks that champion BFF environments in their communities. The team has created and improved processes and practices, and continues to advance its reach at every level — from local, to regional, to statewide — with a constant eye on the long-term sustainability of its efforts.

The breadth of community partners engaged through ABC's outreach efforts is extensive. Since the project's inception, ABC has collectively designated almost 200 partners as BFF. To reduce health inequities, the ABC team focused on organizations that presented greater challenges to individuals meeting their lactation goals: those with low-wage, hourly employees and those that serve larger Colorado Child Care Assistance Program, Medicaid, Child Health Plan *Plus*, and uninsured populations.

The team has provided technical assistance, training, and resources to many public-facing community partners, including restaurants, libraries, school districts, public universities, teen parent programs, city and county locations, municipalities, in-home and informal child care networks, and Federally Qualified Health Centers. These collaborations have resulted in new and stronger policies, more trained staff, and dedicated lactation spaces.

Boulder County Public Health (BCPH) recently reflected on the sheer amount of community engagement and the number of organizations willing to support breastfeeding efforts, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively across three years, ABC has engaged 182 businesses in breastfeeding education and promotion, and the project team has recognized 70 as BFF worksites or public spaces. Notably, BCPH succeeded in recognizing half of those businesses.

Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) echoed ABC's successes with engagement, especially with child care programs. This work makes a difference for both child care providers and the families they serve. ABC has collectively connected with and certified 93 child care providers as BFF. TCHD alone has been able to certify almost a quarter of those BFF providers, even after losing their ABC coordinator to full-time pandemic response efforts in late FY20. The ABC team began the grant by certifying providers at the local/county level. In this third year, the project team has collaborated with [Healthy Child Care Colorado](#) to fund and consult on a statewide certification model that provides greater reach and consistency, not to mention advantages with sustainability.

"One of my most recent families stated they chose me as a provider because I support breastfeeding, knowledge on breast milk storage and handling, and had the breastfeeding space available in the event they needed it."

– Child care provider, Douglas County

ABC has provided support throughout most regions of Colorado, not just in the Denver metro area. The team has worked with more than 40 partners in non-metro communities to champion locally identified lactation needs through facilitating regional connections and offering technical assistance and coalition support. As a result, more than a dozen rural coalitions, LPHAs, and lactation advocates have developed local BFF programs.



Through ABC, LPHAs have worked to increase lactation knowledge and professional certification among a diverse group of child care professionals, medical providers, and community leaders, as these individuals interact with and are trusted by many families. Over three years, ABC has coordinated and funded Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC) training and certification for 57 individuals; Certified Lactation Educator (CLE) training and certification for 19 individuals; and has supported more than 100 individuals in receiving additional trainings, such as specialty trainings for health care providers, the local Community Lactation Access Project trainings, and the nationwide B.L.A.C.K. course. These courses support varied needs, from foundational lactation education for providers to bolster their work with families, to providing course credits for professionals on their path to the advanced CLC certification, known as IBCLC.

ABC has expanded professional lactation training to communities that historically have been underserved. Jefferson County Public Health (JCPH) highlighted their work to support the Latinx community's interest in lactation leadership and partnership with key community sites identified to have the broadest reach. Within the Latinx community, the JCPH-supported Conectando network (formerly Adelante) has grown as a leader over the last few years. A small group of lactation counselors, the Consejeras de Lactancia, have continued their lactation learning pathway and outreach efforts. Their input into JCPH planning efforts has been crucial to ensuring the agency, and ABC more broadly, is responsive to community preferences and needs.

Denver Public Health (DPH) is especially proud of leading conversations and the development of a racial equity framework for ABC in its third year of work. Complementary to other planning documents, the framework outlines guiding principles and strategies for action to hold the ABC partner organizations accountable to reaching and supporting diverse populations with lower breastfeeding rates.

Challenges and Barriers

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on businesses, child care programs, and especially medical offices was noted across the board by ABC team members as the biggest barrier during the grant period. It was difficult to engage community partners during this time and especially challenging to ask them to prioritize additional BFF work on top of their pandemic response efforts. Community partners were struggling to keep operating a business, manage a historic medical crisis, or focus on protecting the children in their care. ABC team members experienced a slowdown in their ability to engage with many partners due to limitations on time, resources, and in-person meetings.

However, the ABC team worked hard and successfully adapted various activities, leading to new ways of engaging with communities— offering remote check-in calls and virtual trainings and learning sessions to partners. For example: DPH reprioritized their involvement in local coalitions and workgroups and identified new ways to partner with staff at Denver Health to address the evolving needs of breastfeeding staff and visitors during the pandemic. BCPH dedicated time and resources to develop [short educational videos](#) to support remote outreach efforts to businesses. Agencies bolstered their [local resource guides](#) to incorporate the latest guidance amidst COVID-19 so partners had easy



access to current information. And despite concerns over the ability to maintain networking in a virtual world, ABC hosted two successful Regional Lactation Days over Zoom this year, engaging 63 individuals across central and western Colorado in shared conversation.

Even prior to the pandemic, the ABC team faced some barriers in implementing challenging activities. Finding small wins among these activities proved to be rewarding. BFF medical office certification is the most complex undertaking among the sectors that ABC supports. Guiding a medical office to improve upon one or two steps in the process is often more attainable and still holds the promise of enacting meaningful change.

Along those lines, members of the ABC team reflected that flexibility in a grant project is necessary in order to be fully responsive to communities' changing needs. The ABC team has remained nimble and open to change while maintaining the core focus of its activities and overarching goals. At times, the inability to carry over funds from one grant year to the next has made it difficult to work with community partners whose agendas and activities do not adhere to the same time restrictions as the state fiscal year. The project team continues to adapt its processes to accommodate community partners whenever possible, such as through ordering lactation space items for sites that do not have the funds to purchase them up front and wait for reimbursement.

ABC team members note that work must be done on the national level for traditional accredited lactation training pathways to become more equitable. Community members find it challenging to locate trainings that are culturally relevant or to gain hours needed for certification. Specifically, Latinx leaders in Jefferson County who completed an online CLC training shared that the course was inaccessible for their learning and language. JCPH is currently supporting Colorado's Community Lactation Access Project in "trans-creating" its offerings to Spanish (different from simply translating in that this process takes nuances and culturally relevant terms into account) and engaging already-trained cohorts in continued support.

Lessons Learned

The ABC team has learned a great deal in these three short years about advancing breastfeeding initiatives and increasing capacity among communities and local leaders. Partnering with local lactation coalitions, the statewide Colorado Breastfeeding Coalition, and other organizations across the state has been important for achieving ABC's goals. The team planned for the sustainability of its activities from day one and continues to adapt its strategies with an eye toward long-term success.

ABC team members have learned that engaging larger sites to improve their BFF policies and practices can involve a multi-year process. BCPH began engaging the University of Colorado before the first year of this grant and finally saw the results of their efforts during the final two quarters of FY21. Finding a champion at these larger sites — and hoping that champion doesn't move on from the organization before the work is done — is crucial to success. Only so much progress can be made from the outside, so finding the right internal person to advocate for change can make all the difference.



Teamwork truly makes the dream work! Over the last three years, members of the ABC team have connected twice each month at standing meetings — and many times in between — to share activities and challenges at the local level, develop regional efforts, and cultivate new partnerships that can improve momentum around BFF initiatives. Team members have shared that having a lead grantee like CHI to focus on grant administration and evaluation has been an effective and valuable element of ABC’s organizational structure. While CHI convenes and leads the partnership, CHI looks for opportunities to share leadership and build capacity through empowering others on the project team to take ownership of different bodies of work.

Despite working to meet a hefty implementation plan for each of the last three years, ABC team members still identified activities that would be important to include in future iterations of the work. Offering funding for lactation spaces has been instrumental in community partners’ abilities to implement lactation policies. The ABC team hopes to further that work by exploring the time and resources necessary to continue engaging with businesses that have already been recognized as BFF. Businesses that were recognized early in the grant may lose momentum over time due to staff turnover and competing priorities. Going forward, TCHD plans to implement annual check-ins with businesses that have already achieved BFF recognition.

As another example, BCPH realized that it did not have adequate resources to engage Latinx communities, which make up a substantial portion of Boulder County’s population and are known to experience disparities in breastfeeding support and success. BCPH is in the process of hiring a Spanish-speaking breastfeeding program specialist to better support the agency in assessing the needs of the Latinx community around breastfeeding services and resources.

The ABC team is committed to understanding the important role that local public health plays in addressing health inequities. Members of the team strive to learn continuously, listen deeply, and engage authentically with community representatives. As outlined in ABC’s racial equity framework, the team recognizes the importance of compensating community members and experts for their time and taking action on the valuable feedback that is shared through trusted community partners. The project team also intends to use an equity lens for future decision-making, especially around funding, to continue to increase the equity and availability of lactation support services across the state for those who need support the most.

ABC is grateful to the CCPD grants program team, the CCPD Review Committee, and CDPHE leadership for the opportunity to continue this important work for two additional years. The ABC team looks forward to scaling its current activities and implementing new ones to further breastfeeding support in communities across Colorado.

Advancing Breastfeeding in Colorado



Before and after lactation space, Denver



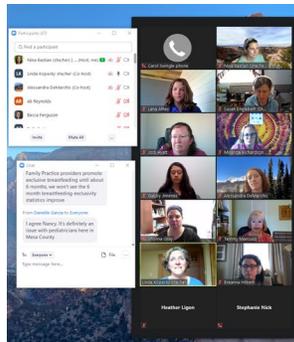
TCHD's model lactation tent



JeffCo Consejeras de Lactancia 2019



Regional Lactation Day 2019, Salida



Virtual Regional Lactation Day 2021

Colorado Laws to Support Breastfeeding

- Workplace Accommodations for Nursing Mothers Act: The Colorado law (8-13.5-104) requires ALL employers (businesses with one or more employees) to:
 - Provide reasonable unpaid break time, or allow an employee to use paid break and/or meal time, each day to express breast milk for their nursing child up to 2 years after the child's birth.
 - Make reasonable efforts to provide a private location in close proximity to the work area (other than a toilet stall) where an employee can express breast milk.
 - Not discriminate against the employee for expressing breast milk in the workplace.



Western Slope BF Coalition's family-friendly feeding tent



Breastfeeding welcome here!

Two social media posts. The left one is from Tri-County Health Department WIC congratulating Village Children's Academy. The right one is from Jefferson County Public Health congratulating Focus on Kids Pediatrics.

Social media posts recognizing BFF sites

A screenshot of a website page titled "Lactation space" with a map of CU Boulder campus showing the locations of lactation rooms.

CU Boulder web language and map of lactation rooms