



## Advancing Breastfeeding in Colorado FY19-23 Five-Year Comprehensive Report

### Project Description

**Title:** Advancing Breastfeeding in Colorado (ABC)

**Strategy:** Policy and Environmental Change, Breastfeeding

**Funding:** \$3,447,500 total for FY19-23

**Geography:** Statewide; support for organizations and individuals across 47 counties

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 has worked with local and regional partners to create a seamless system of culturally relevant lactation support and effect policy change.

The ABC team is composed of dedicated staff within ABC's local public health agency (LPHA) partners — Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas (formerly Tri-County); Boulder; Denver; and Jefferson counties — who work with organizations in their respective jurisdictions. An additional Durango-based ABC team member provides 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 development of 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 included: 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 local coalitions or workgroups; 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 law. Often community partners are unaware of the state law and how to support employees until ABC partners with them.



## Grant Accomplishments

The ABC team is incredibly proud of its collective accomplishments over the past five 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 created and improved processes and practices 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 is extensive. Since the project's inception, ABC has collectively recognized over 400 partners as breastfeeding friendly. To reduce health inequities, the ABC team focused on organizations in the Denver metro area with individuals who earn low-wages, hourly employees, and organizations that serve larger Colorado Child Care Assistance Program, Medicaid, Child Health Plan *Plus*, and uninsured populations.

The team has provided technical assistance, training, and support to public-facing business partners, including restaurants, libraries, school districts, public universities, city and county locations, municipalities, in-home and informal child care providers, pediatric clinics, and Federally Qualified Health Centers. These collaborations have resulted in new and stronger policies, more trained staff in lactation, and dedicated lactation spaces. To sustain this work, ABC partnered with the Colorado Breastfeeding Coalition to create a self-guided statewide [Lactation Friendly Workplace Recognition Program](#), offered for free to employers across Colorado. As a result, lactation education, resources, and recognition for businesses will continue beyond ABC grant funding.

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 five years, ABC has coordinated and funded Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC) training and certification for 107 individuals; Certified Lactation Educator (CLE) training and certification for 29 individuals; and has supported more than 150 individuals in receiving additional trainings, such as specialty trainings for health care providers, the local 52-hour Community Lactation Access Project training, and the nationwide B.L.A.C.K. course. These courses support various needs, from foundational lactation education for providers to bolster their work with families, to course hours for those on pathways to advanced lactation certification, such as becoming an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC).

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. Through the Human Milk Feeding Supportive Funding Program, ABC and the Colorado Breastfeeding Coalition distributed just over \$150,000 across five years to 92 community lactation projects around advanced lactation training, BFF environments, coalition building capacity, community lactation support, and community outreach.

## LPHA Highlights

Boulder County Public Health 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, ABC has engaged over 300 businesses specifically in breastfeeding education



and promotion, and the project team has formally recognized 169 as BFF. Boulder 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. Boulder hired a Spanish-speaking program specialist to better support the agency in assessing the needs of the Latinx community around breastfeeding services and resources.

*"Knowing that almost two-thirds of new parents stop lactation earlier than they want to because of a lack of support was a significant motivating factor in working with this program. We have a responsibility as an employer to support our new parents and connect them to the resources they need to ensure their own health, as well as the health of their newborns. This is a key tenet of the social side of sustainability and core to our success as an organization."*

- Garrett Chappell, Senior Sustainability Specialist for Premier Members Credit Union

Staff of the former Tri-County Health Department 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. The ABC team began by offering providers BFF recognition at the local/county level. In the third year of the project, the team began collaborating with [Healthy Child Care Colorado](#) to fund and consult on a statewide recognition model that provides greater reach, consistency, and sustainability beyond ABC grant funding. ABC has collectively connected with and recognized 165 child care providers as BFF, not including recognitions by Healthy Child Care Colorado.

ABC has expanded professional lactation training to communities that historically have been underserved. Jefferson County Public Health highlighted their work to support the Latinx community's interest in lactation leadership. The Cuenta Conmigo Cooperative has grown as a leader in the community over the last few years, with support from Jefferson County along with funders such as the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO). The lactation counselors, Consejeras de Lactancia, that lead the Cooperative have expanded their lactation learning pathways and broader health navigation for immigrant families. Their input into Jefferson County planning efforts has been crucial to ensuring the agency, and ABC more broadly, is responsive to community ideas and solutions.

The Public Health Institute at Denver Health is especially proud of leading conversations and the development of a racial equity framework for ABC. 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. ABC shared this framework with its partners for future projects.

## **Challenges and Barriers**

ABC team members noted the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on businesses, child care providers, and especially medical offices as their biggest barrier during the grant period. The pandemic made it difficult to engage community partners during this time and especially challenging to ask them to prioritize BFF work on top of their pandemic response efforts. Community partners were struggling to operate 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 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: LPHAs bolstered their [local resource guides](#) to incorporate the latest COVID-19 guidance so partners had easy access to current information. Boulder County dedicated time and resources to develop [short educational videos](#) to support remote outreach efforts to businesses. And despite concerns over the ability to maintain networking in a virtual world, ABC hosted three years of successful Regional Lactation Days over Zoom, engaging over 200 individuals across central and western Colorado in shared conversation.

Even prior to the pandemic, the ABC team faced barriers in implementing complex activities. Finding small wins among these activities proved to be rewarding. BFF medical office recognition is the biggest undertaking among the sectors that ABC supports. This past year, the team simplified a process for medical offices to participate. Guiding a medical office to improve one or two steps in the certification 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 to be fully responsive to communities' changing needs. The ABC team remained nimble 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 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 adapted its processes to accommodate community partners whenever possible, for example through direct ordering of 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 lactation training pathways to become more equitable. Many existing trainings are not culturally relevant or accessible in multiple languages. Specifically, Latinx leaders in Jefferson County who completed an online CLC training shared that the course was inaccessible for their learning and language needs. This feedback encouraged ABC to help fund transcreation for Colorado's Community Lactation Access Project course into Spanish. Transcreation is different from simply translating in that the process incorporates nuances and culturally relevant terms. As a result, two bilingual trainers are now teaching the course in Spanish several times a year, both in Colorado and in other states. ABC also supported the Community Lactation Access Project in applying to become a training partner with the national CLC certification body, which would make those who complete the course eligible to sit for the CLC exam.

## Lessons Learned

The ABC team has learned a great deal about 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 continuously adapted its strategies for long-term success. ABC funding also allowed the team to leverage and apply for new funds in this last year.

ABC team members have learned that engaging larger sites to improve policies and practices can take multiple years. Boulder County Public Health began engaging the University of Colorado Boulder before the first year of this grant and finally saw the results of their efforts three years later. 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 five 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 each year, ABC team members identified activities along the way to prioritize in future iterations of their work together. The team engaged in strategic planning sessions to finalize two priorities: to establish a strong network of lactation professionals that are representative of and connected with the communities they serve; and to support development of a coordinated system of Family Friend and Neighbor (FFN) provider networks in the Denver metro area. Team members plan to continue seeking opportunities and leveraging funding to advance these priorities where possible, knowing that this work may take time. Additionally, the team found value in staying connected with businesses who have been recognized as BFF on an annual basis, for example by sharing lactation resources during World Breastfeeding Week. LPHAs should maintain strong relationships with the business community through regular communication, not only on lactation resources but other public health information as well.

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 used an equity lens for decision-making, especially around funding, to continue to increase the availability of lactation support services across the state for those who have the least amount of access to resources and support.

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ABC is grateful to the Cancer, Cardiovascular, and Pulmonary Disease (CCPD) grants program team, the CCPD Review Committee, and leadership of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for the opportunity to pursue this important work for five years. Despite the end of funding for the project, the ABC team is committed to keeping in touch with each other and exploring new ways to further lactation support in communities across Colorado.



Before and after lactation space, Denver



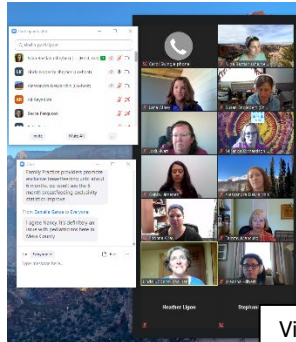
Model lactation tent



Western Slope Breastfeeding Coalition's family-friendly feeding tent



Regional Lactation Day, Rifle, 2023



Virtual Regional Lactation Day, 2021

### Colorado Laws to Support Breastfeeding

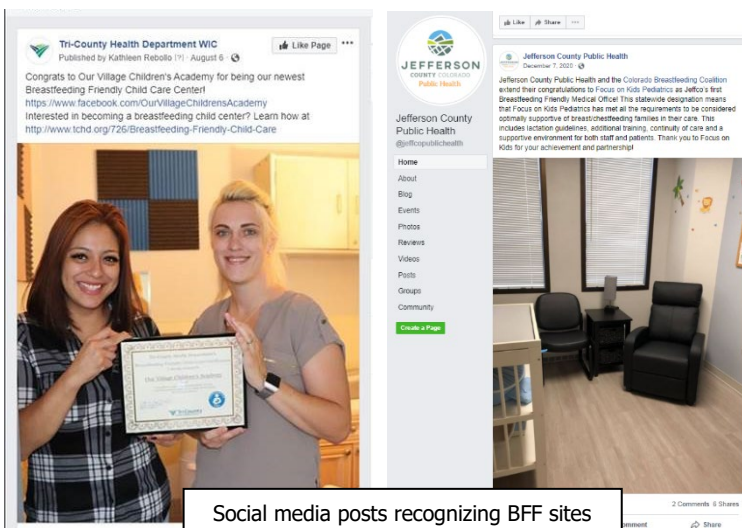
- Workplace Accommodations for Nursing Mothers Act The Colorado law (8-13-5-104) requires ALL employers (businesses with one or more employees) to:
  - Provide reasonable unpaid break time, or allow an employee to use paid break and/or meal time, each day to express breast milk for their nursing child 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



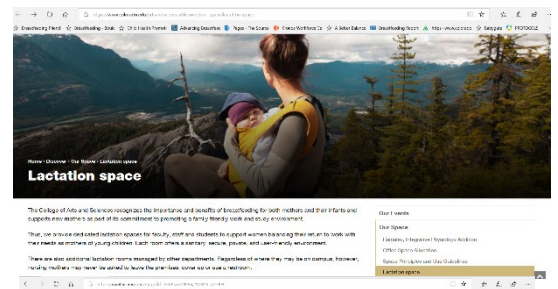
Community Lactation Access Project graduates, 2023



"Breastfeeding welcome here!"



Social media posts recognizing BFF sites



CU Boulder web language and map of lactation rooms

