

## Breastfeeding Success Depends on Many Influencers

By: Michele Haugh, Workplace Prevention and Equity

August is [National Breastfeeding Month](#). The observance was established to amplify the messages of the [World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action](#) to promote the tremendous [health, economic, and environmental](#) benefits of human milk and to champion policies and practices that ensure all families have the opportunity to breastfeed/[chestfeed](#). Today, most parents are aware and want their infants to receive the nutritional benefits of human milk but many face barriers.

In an attempt to overcome barriers and encourage parents to breastfeed/chestfeed, messages are sometimes oversimplified. This can result in unrealistic expectations and parents being unprepared to overcome challenges that may occur during their breastfeeding journey. The reality is that human lactation is a complex physiological and psychosocial process, the success of which is influenced by multiple individual and organizational forces, some of which are listed below.

- Individual cultural beliefs, experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and biases of
  - ⇒ Infant's parents
  - ⇒ Extended family and members of the household
  - ⇒ Doctors, nurses and medical staff
  - ⇒ Parents' supervisor and co-workers
  - ⇒ Infant's care providers
  - ⇒ Community-based workers and public health workers
- Organizational policies, environments, systems, and culture of
  - ⇒ Medical offices and hospitals
  - ⇒ Parents' workplace or school
  - ⇒ Childcare center/home
  - ⇒ Community-based organizations and public agencies

Each of these influencers have the potential to either support or undermine the breastfeeding/chestfeeding success of any and all families. But, for families of color, the [racism and biases](#) inherent in many of these influencers have a disproportionately negative affect on breastfeeding/chestfeeding rates and outcomes.

In an attempt to shine a light on structural, systemic and interpersonal racism and biases and to understand historical and cultural barriers, National Breastfeeding Month includes weekly observances focused on different racial and ethnic groups.

- Week 2 (Aug 8-14): [Indigenous Milk Medicine Week](#) (2021 resources [here](#)). Theme: Strengthening Our Traditions from Birth and Beyond
- Week 3 (Aug 15-21): [Asian American Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Breastfeeding Week](#)  
Theme: Telling Our Own Stories. Elevating Our Voices.
- Week 4 (Aug 25-31): [Black Breastfeeding Week](#)  
Theme: Black Breastfeeding Week 2022: 10 Years, A New Foundation  
The truth is, if human lactation was simple, we wouldn't need an army of people to protect it including our own WIC Educators, Breastfeeding Peer Counselors, Dietitians, and Nurses. Behind these dedicated front-liners we also work with employers, child cares, public spaces, and medical offices to create supportive policies and get certified as Breastfeeding/Lactation Friendly as part of a regional initiative known as [Advancing Breastfeeding in Colorado](#). Representatives from all of TCHD's breastfeeding related programs are convened regularly for peer learning and sharing under TCHD's Breastfeeding Promotion Workgroup, led by [Heidi Williams](#). Heidi is also the person who spearheaded internal support for TCHD employees as they return to work after the birth of a child. She created our [Lactation Support](#) and [Infant-at-Work](#) policies which are now administered through Jess Gomez (currently on maternity leave) in our [Human Resources Division](#). *This is clue #3*

### How can you get involved?

- Share** TCHD's Lactation Resource Guide ([English](#), [Spanish](#)) with your networks.
- Spread the word** about the valuable resources offered by [ColoradoWIC.com](#) to families.
- Learn** why [gender-inclusive language](#) is important and start using it.
- Encourage** friends and family to advocate for their right to [lactation support at their workplace](#).
- Train up** with these free [learning opportunities](#) compiled for medical offices but open to most.
- Forward** [Breastfeeding/Lactation Friendly Certification](#) resources to employers, child cares and medical offices in your network (TCHD contact for this regional project is [Sue Howk](#)).
- Visit** [BreastfeedColorado.com](#) for more resources and action tools.