



PRESS RELEASE

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HOLISTIC MOMS NETWORK CELEBRATES WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK THROUGH ADVOCACY

The Holistic Moms Network (HMN) – a national non-profit organization with 130 chapters across the U.S. – joins the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action and 120 participant countries in celebrating the 17th annual World Breastfeeding Week, August 1 – 7. This year, organizers are calling for "increased support for mothers in achieving the gold standard of infant feeding: breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months, and continued breastfeeding. . . for up to two years and beyond." These recommendations are endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Public Health Association, among others.

"At Holistic Moms we are committed to helping families get the crucial support, encouragement, and information they need to breastfeed successfully from birth and beyond," says Dr. Nancy Massotto, HMN's Executive Director who nursed her first son for 3+ years and is still nursing her second 25-month-old son.

U.S. health agencies have recommended exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of a child's life. The Department of Health and Human Service's 'Healthy People 2010' initiative set the goal of increasing the proportion of mothers who exclusively nursed their infants for 3 months to 60% and for 6 months to 25%.

Although breastfeeding initiation rates have risen by 77% compared to a decade ago - thanks to concerted education campaigns - so far only 4 states - Alaska, Montana, Oregon, and Washington - have met the agency's targets. Data from a government survey, published in 2007, recorded breastfeeding rates of 30.5% at 3 months and 11.3% at 6 months, far below the desired targets, and far below Norway's admirable 80% rate at 6 months. Similarly, global data show that less than 40% of infants under 6 months are exclusively breastfed today, leading to

the unnecessary deaths of over a million children per year – "lives that could be saved if mothers and families were adequately encouraged and supported to breastfeed," according to WHO. Experts attribute these distressing figures to a host of causes: poverty, lack of education, lack of support within families, communities and the workplace, marketing of formula to new mothers in hospitals and pediatricians' offices, and the lack of appropriate policies and legislation to support a breastfeeding culture.

Like the Norwegians, however, many HMN members practice extended breastfeeding. "Our members are educated about the many positive and well-documented health, emotional, economic, and environmental benefits of breastfeeding," says Massotto. "They practice many of the recommended strategies for ensuring successful breastfeeding," she says. These include becoming informed about breastfeeding and breastfeeding resources before their babies are born; striving to eat and live healthy; avoiding toxins and over-the-counter medications like head cold remedies which can reduce milk supply; practicing attachment parenting and sleeping with, or close to, their babies. And probably most importantly, connecting with other nursing moms through HMN's online forums and local Chapters which host monthly meetings and playgroups. "Because nursing can sometimes be challenging, especially in the beginning, and because ongoing support for breastfeeding is critical for long-term success, we're thrilled that HMN's local chapters and online communities have provided such a vital support system for thousands of new moms," says Massotto.

HMN members are working to provide that vital support to other women in their communities. This past Saturday, HMN's Green Bay (Wisconsin) Chapter participated in a Breastfeeding Walk. They also teamed up with a local Attachment Parenting group and the Brown County Breastfeeding Coalition to launch "Project Support." The campaign aims to promote breastfeeding in hospitals and counteract the damaging effects of the formula-filled "discharge bags" that are routinely given to new mothers on behalf of formula companies. Because the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months starting from birth, hospitals that distribute formula are violating the AAP's advice. Like banthebags.org - which successfully convinced several hundred hospitals to stop handing out "discharge bags," - HMN's "Project Support" canvas totes are filled with disposable Avent nursing pads, Lansinoh breast balm, Lusa's organic diaper rash cream, Medela breast pump supplies, relevant children's books, and educational and local resource materials for new moms. The bags were recently distributed to all four local area hospitals and the local Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. "They were very well received," says Angie Flanagan, the Green Bay Chapter Co-Leader. "Women who reject formula and opt for breastfeeding are not making a

lifestyle choice, they are actually following doctors' orders. So we hope that hospitals and pediatricians everywhere will support our efforts and start distributing our bags, says Flanagan." HMN hopes to launch "Project Support" nationally next year.

This past Friday, HMN's Central Bucks County (Pennsylvania) Chapter paired up with a local La Leche League group and organized a "Nurse Out" in front of the O'Bambino Store - a new maternity/natural baby store in downtown Doylestown. A group of over a dozen nursing mothers handed out information about breastfeeding while a belly dancer provided entertainment. A lactation consultant was also on hand to offer advice to those who wanted it. "Our goal was to raise awareness for breastfeeding as a natural act, and, above all, to help mothers feel comfortable about nursing in public," says Chapter Leader Marlene Pray.

Finally, this month, HMN's Knoxville, Tennessee Chapter is launching a comprehensive breastfeeding support and education campaign with the East Tennessee Breastfeeding Coalition. The groups have assembled packets for local businesses and health practitioners. They include an international breastfeeding symbol window cling and a letter explaining the importance of breastfeeding and the need for breastfeeding-friendly establishments for clients and employees alike. HMN Chapter members plan on distributing these packets to dozens of businesses on foot, face-to-face. "Many women in our Chapter have offered to help us flood the city with breastfeeding symbols," says Chapter Co-Leader Erika Magnuson. Members will also be asking local pediatricians and obstetricians to display the Ad Council's National Breastfeeding Campaign posters (see <http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/index.cfm?page=adcouncil>).

HMN will continue to work towards creating a breastfeeding culture by providing information and encouragement to breastfeeding mothers and their families, by expanding programs like "Project Support," and encouraging local Chapters to launch and/or participate in breastfeeding advocacy campaigns like World Breastfeeding Week.

For more information about the Holistic Moms Network, please visit www.holisticmoms.org or call (877) HOL-MOMS.