

# How Researchers Can Help

## *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding*

Across the United States, most new mothers hope to breastfeed. Breastfeeding can protect the health of babies and their mothers. With support from their families and communities, as well as from researchers, mothers are more likely to be able to breastfeed their babies.

### **How You Can Help Support Breastfeeding**

Leading health organizations\* agree that most babies should have only breast milk for the first 6 months of life and should be breastfed for at least 12 months. Your efforts can help to

- Answer questions on how to improve breastfeeding rates among women who are least likely to breastfeed.
- Identify the current barriers and types of support for breastfeeding.

Information from studies can be used to

- Provide clinicians and public health professionals with factual information so they can offer guidance and support to breastfeeding mothers.
- Guide development of policies that encourage and support breastfeeding women.
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of breastfeeding programs.

### **Find ways to reduce disparities.**

You can help to answer questions such as how to decrease differences in breastfeeding rates that are associated with race/ethnicity, income, and preterm birth.

### **Identify savings that result from breastfeeding.**

You can help answer questions such as how to best support breastfeeding mothers who have special circumstances. For example, women who have given birth early and mothers of infants with a low birth weight may need extra support to breastfeed successfully. More needs to be known about breastfeeding in special situations.

### **Collaborate on top research priorities.**

By working together, researchers can find better ways to gather information from women about their breastfeeding routines and challenges. Researchers also need to work together to overcome barriers they now face in designing studies and to widen the uses of research on breastfeeding. By working together, researchers can help prioritize research areas, expand the amount and quality of research to be done, and hasten the application of research to practice.

### **Train new scientists.**

The fields of medicine, other health professions, and health sciences need researchers to increase understanding of breastfeeding science and behavior. Increasing the number of scientists specifically trained to study breastfeeding could allow researchers to design and carry out sound studies on many topics. More in-school and on-the-job opportunities are needed to train researchers interested in breastfeeding questions.

\* Includes the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American College of Nurse-Midwives, American Dietetic Association, and American Public Health Association.



### **How You Can Take Action**

- Explore what type of research is needed for different aspects of breastfeeding. For example, clinicians, public health professionals, and policy makers need information to make decisions that support mothers' intentions to breastfeed.
- More research on breastfeeding is a priority. Recruiting more researchers will help to answer current questions and ensure the availability of scientists as new issues arise in breastfeeding research.
- Look at the key actions recommended by the Surgeon General (see next page) for research to support breastfeeding.
- Make a commitment to support breastfeeding mothers through your research. Your research can help improve the health of breastfeeding mothers and their babies.



# From the Surgeon General

## Key Actions for Research to Support Breastfeeding



### High-Quality Breastfeeding Research

#### Action 17: Increase funding of high-quality research on breastfeeding.

- Designate additional research funding for studies on how to increase breastfeeding rates, the economics of breastfeeding, and the management of lactation.
- This can be achieved by issuing program announcements, requests for research applications, and contract proposals.

### New Research Is Needed

#### Disparities in Breastfeeding Rates

- Research is needed on methods of promoting breastfeeding among populations with current low rates.
- At present, the information available for selecting the most cost-effective interventions to promote and support breastfeeding is limited. Randomized designs and evaluations of existing programs designed to advance breastfeeding could add to this evidence.

#### Economic Analysis

- Research is needed on the economic impact of breastfeeding in the United States. Although some studies have shown the potential for significant cost savings through breastfeeding, more precise information is needed on who will benefit from these savings.

#### Lactation and Breastfeeding Management

- Research is needed on ways to better manage lactation and breastfeeding. Health professionals must deal with a variety of special situations that may make breastfeeding challenging or that may need to be managed differently if a woman is breastfeeding. The information for making clinical decisions in these situations is often lacking and thus needs to be expanded.

### Strengthen Breastfeeding Research

#### Action 18. Strengthen existing capacity and develop future capacity for conducting research on breastfeeding.

- Develop a national consortium on breastfeeding research.
- Enhance the training of scientists in basic and applied research on lactation, breastfeeding, and women's and children's health.

### Collaboration and Training

#### National Research Consortium

- Develop a national consortium on breastfeeding research. A national consortium would help overcome the limitations that researchers now face in designing studies, increase the generalizability of research on breastfeeding, help prioritize key research areas, enable expanded and advanced research to be performed, and foster the timely translation of research into practice.
- A consortium would bring together researchers to
  - ▶ Standardize definitions of specific terms and measures used to classify the variables used in research on breastfeeding.
  - ▶ Promote the use of these definitions.
  - ▶ Identify ethical study designs that would expand the knowledge that has been generated thus far from observational studies.
  - ▶ Develop and update national agendas for surveillance and research on topics related to breastfeeding and infant nutrition.
  - ▶ Spearhead funding strategies to help accomplish the agenda developed by the consortium.
  - ▶ Facilitate communication among researchers.
  - ▶ Promote the dissemination of research findings and monitor their translation into best practices.

#### Training

- Enhance the training of scientists in basic and applied research on lactation, breastfeeding, and women's and children's health.
  - ▶ This may include the development of specific curricula in medical schools, in educational programs for other health professionals, and in health science programs.
  - ▶ These actions ensure that a skilled cadre of scientists is available and appropriately trained to undertake this research.