



Empowering parents to enable breastfeeding



WIC Peer Breastfeeding Support Program

Breastfeeding promotion and support is a priority for MN WIC. Since 2005, many local WIC agencies have offered peer counseling services to eligible WIC participants.

Why is it important?

Breastfeeding improves the health of infants, mothers, families and communities. Breastfed infants have lower rates of infections, respiratory & GI illnesses, some types of cancers, and SIDS compared to formula-fed babies. Mothers who breastfed have less risk of breast and ovarian cancers, diabetes, and heart disease. Increasing breastfeeding rates for WIC clients, a population who are at higher risk due to their socioeconomic status, is a goal of WIC. Peer data show that having a peer increases breastfeeding initiation significantly (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Breastfeeding Rates

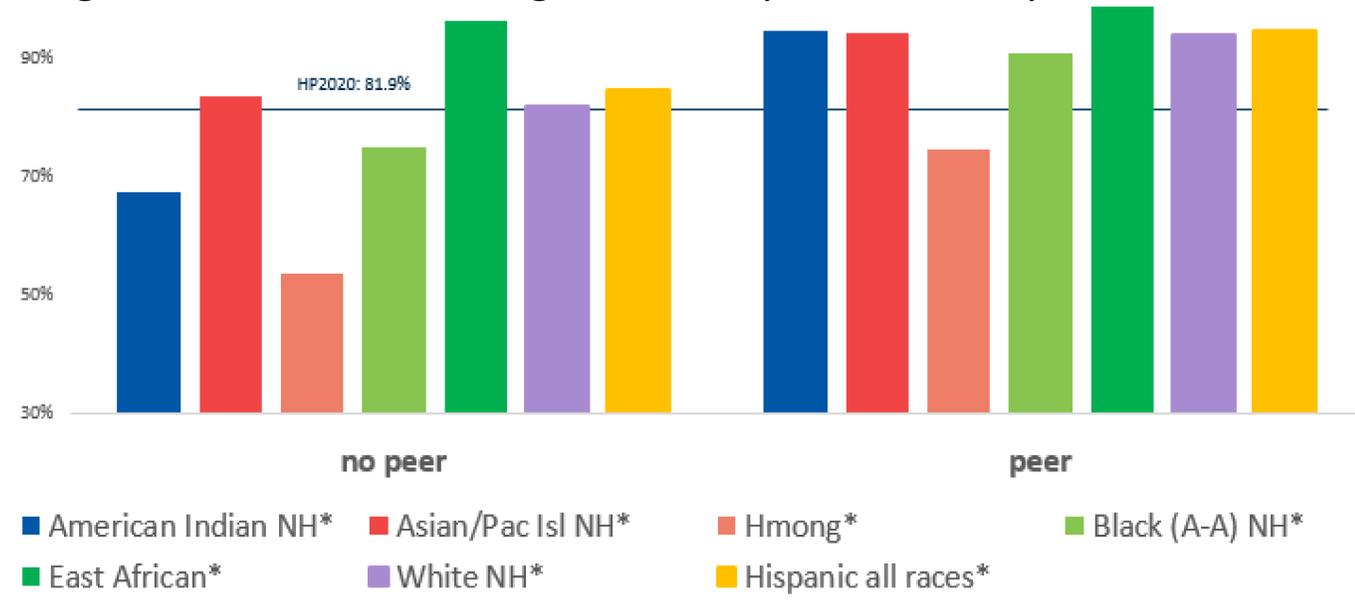
Why it works

Peer programs have hired, trained, and provided the means for connecting counselors with pregnant and new moms. WIC recruits peers who are of the same culture and speak the same language as their clients. Peers are also available outside usual business hours to address common concerns. Disparities exist in breastfeeding rates in Minnesota by race, ethnicity, culture and geographic locations. Peers who represent those they serve have been shown to reduce these disparities and increase health equity as seen in Figure 2.

Lessons Learned

The WIC information system allows us to gather data by race, culture/ethnicity and by location. It has provided WIC the opportunity to see where differences occur rather than being included or shadowed by other data. More specific race/ethnicity data allows us to break out African Americans by American-born and immigrant-born and Hmong from Asian which show great differences between the populations. Outside of data, the program is learning how to improve communication between WIC clients and peers. Even with smartphone access, clients do not often answer their phones or texts and communication preferences vary by culture or ethnicity.

Figure 2: WIC Breastfeeding Initiation by race/ethnicity, 2017



Results and Next Steps

Knowing where our greatest disparities exist assists with determining priorities with our limited resources. We offer opportunities to address disparities and are exploring ways to expand the program statewide. By collaborating with community partners WIC shares the program curriculum and provides education to those who can implement their own peer program in areas of need. WIC has partnered with OSHII SHIP and the MN Breastfeeding Coalition (MBC) which also focus on statewide efforts to improve breastfeeding for all mothers and babies through systems and environment changes in maternity care, public health, workplace, and childcare settings.

Team Members

Linda Dech, Pat Faulkner, Marcia McCoy, Mary Johnson, Joni Geppert



Images of MN WIC Peer counselors including a program coordinator and community partner.