

Public Health and the Ho-Chunk Nation: Using the Continuity of Care Blueprint to Build and Support a Culture of Breastfeeding in Sauk County

Implementing the Continuity of Care in Breastfeeding Support Blueprint

By Jennifer Weitzel
Sauk County Health Department

Synopsis

Sauk County is home to 65,763 residents, almost half of whom live in rural communities. The population is largely white, non-Hispanic (90%) with a growing Latinx community. Sauk County is also home to the Ho-Chunk Nation, one of two First Nations with an oral history placing their origin in Wisconsin.

The overall goal of this project was to begin to create a culture of chest/breastfeeding throughout Sauk County such that lactation messaging and spaces are highly visible, accessible, and culturally relevant. Using social media and print materials, Sauk County Health Department's project partners shared messages that normalized and promoted the practice of chest/breastfeeding. Through digital storytelling, thirteen (13) families were encouraged to share personal experiences of navigating continuity of care in their breastfeeding journeys.

Challenge

Sauk County's healthcare professionals are passionate about supporting the breastfeeding goals of community members and providing consistent and culturally congruent family-centered support. This is supported in practice as each healthcare system employs staff who are board certified lactation consultants (CLC). The dietician for the Ho-Chunk Nation as well as seven (7) of the eight (8) Public Health Sauk County (PHSC) nurse home visitors are board-certified. Of the three (3) service providers on the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) staff, two (2) are CLCs and one (1) is an Internationally Board-Certified Lactation Consultant. WIC has also contracted two breastfeeding peer counselors to provide additional support for the community.



Despite the efforts of lactation support professionals (LSPs), Sauk County needs a supportive built environment and a community culture that encourages and supports community members to chest/breastfeed. This is evidenced by the lack of dedicated lactation spaces throughout the county. Despite consistently high initiation rates among WIC participants, breastfeeding continuation rates drop precipitously after initiation.

Solution

Training

Sauk County Public Health partnered with WIC and the Ho-Chunk Nation Department of Public Health to

address the precipitous drops in breastfeeding rates after initiation. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and through NACCHO's Continuity of Care in Breastfeeding Support Blueprint project, Sauk County implemented evidence-based, tangible strategies that worked across the social-ecological model: individual, family, community, and systems levels. From November 1, 2022 to December 15, 2023, Sauk County addressed strategies 1.1 (community assessment), 2.1 (lactation spaces), 2.7 (social marketing), 4.2 (data standardization), 5.2 (workforce development), 6.4 (shared decision-making tool).



Ho-Chunk Nation Logo

Results

With the grant funding, Sauk County was able to train one Ho-Chunk Tribal member to become an Indigenous Lactation Counselor. This was especially important to the Sauk County team to support and ensure training of a community member that supports the principle of breastfeeding as a traditional practice and an act of resiliency within the Ho-Chunk Nation. Following this training, she has also earned her doula certified. Three nurses (two from Sauk County Public Health and one from the Ho-Chunk Nation) participated in a 20-hour advanced motivational interviewing (MI) course through the University of WI- Madison.

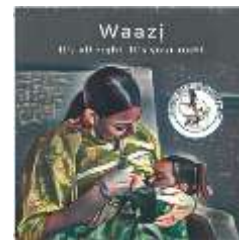
With these skills, these nurses created a new infant-feeding questionnaire. This questionnaire includes open-ended questions designed to engage the client in a dialogue about their infant feeding goals. To further strengthen this nurse-to-client engagement model, the nurses developed a motivational interviewing companion guide to demonstrate how nurses can

leverage MI principles when supporting a client. See the resources section below for a link to the interview guide.

The success of the questionnaire led to five additional public health nurses attending the Great Lakes Motivational Interviewing (MI) Conference, which is a one-day conference held at the iconic Lambeau Field. From the MI trainings, two nurses created a care plan for Ho-Chunk Nation families that included a survey to guide LSPs with creating a birth care plan to support families while they identify a breastfeeding goal, infant feeding goals, and/or other family and personal goals. From the survey responses, it became clear that families and breastfeeding parents were interested in receiving more breastfeeding knowledge prior to labor. As a result, Ho-Chunk Nation hopes to weave these findings into their home visiting program.

Lactation-Friendly Businesses

Sauk County Health Department designed three (3) window decals to indicate that a local business is a breastfeeding/lactation-friendly space. The decals were developed in three (3) languages spoken frequently throughout the community: English, Spanish, and Ho-Chunk. To further encourage local businesses and facilities to consider become lactation-friendly, the health department highlighted the businesses that displayed these decals on the *Public Health Sauk County* Facebook page. As a result, each post garnered an average of 2,058 engagements, and several businesses in the area have contacted the health department to request the decals.



Sauk County Health Department created decals such as the one above to indicate breastfeeding/lactation-friendly spaces.

Designated Lactation Spaces

To strengthen the built environment supports for chest/breastfeeding parents and caregivers in the area, Sauk County leveraged grant funding to acquire furniture and equipment for three local libraries, one county building, and one large employer to furnish newly designated lactation spaces. The team went

further to ensure that signage for the space incorporated non-gendered language. For example, rather than designate a space as a mother's room, a local library survey response indicated a need for strengthened SDOH supports for education, health literacy, economic sustainability, and programs related to infant and toddler nutrition. This was further supported by responses that indicated how influential formula marketing strategies have been for families in Sauk County. Secondly, sharing these themes as well as the anecdotal experiences from community members supported Public Health Sauk County's efforts to earn stakeholder buy-in for establishing sustained lactation spaces.

Lastly, survey responses highlighted additional challenges that the health department might have otherwise overlooked if the team did not connect with community members. One of the notable examples is the use of non-binary and gender inclusive language is not connected with other libraries and continues to build relationships with staff persons to continue establishing lactation spaces and lactation friendly environments.

As a result of this project, Sauk County has secured additional funding to purchase a Mamava lactation pod to be placed in the Ho-Chunk House of Wellness. The health department went on further to supply the Ho-Chunk Nation with a portable air-conditioning unit for the chest/breastfeeding tent at pow-wows.

Lessons Learned

Using multiple data sources ensured that the interventions were data driven and informed by community voices. As a team, Sauk County Public Health facilitated a trend mapping exercise to determine what their team understood to be the current breastfeeding support landscape in Sauk County. The team then reviewed breast feeding initiation and duration rates among participants of WIC and Nurse-Family Partnership. To gain insight on the breastfeeding experiences of the greater community, Sauk conducted an online survey with quantitative and qualitative data and testimonials from community members who were willing to share their breastfeeding journey.

The collection and analysis of these data sources was fundamental to this project's development and implementation. The data validated the common barriers that community members described related to their breastfeeding goals, especially regarding social determinants of health (SDOH). In summary, these learnings will continue to inform the programmatic initiatives and goals of the department.

Resources

[Sauk County Decals and Posts](#)

[Sauk County Breastfeeding Survey](#)

[Feeding Plan Document](#)

Contact us at: breastfeeding@naccho.org