



District of Columbia  
Breastfeeding  
**NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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August 2025

# Executive Summary

The DC Breastfeeding Coalition and DC Health collaborated to conduct a breastfeeding needs assessment for the District of Columbia. We evaluated the breastfeeding experiences of 224 parents through surveys and focus groups and surveyed 68 healthcare providers (hospital, primary care, obstetric, lactation and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) providers about their experiences supporting the breastfeeding dyad.

## Key Findings:

- There is a clear need for education about common breastfeeding challenges, not just for parents, but also for families and support networks.
- Fewer than one in three parents (29%) reported that their obstetric provider discussed breastfeeding during prenatal care. Obstetric providers cited several barriers to offering breastfeeding education and support, including limited time, lack of reimbursement, insufficient knowledge, and inadequate access to lactation specialists.
- Nearly half of respondents said their child received formula in the hospital. The most common reasons included poor latch, concerns about milk supply, and personal preference.
- After hospital discharge, almost 40% of participants experienced breastfeeding difficulties.
- One-third of respondents stopped breastfeeding earlier than they intended. The top reasons were returning to work or school and not receiving timely support.
- Primary care providers reported that they often lack the time and expertise needed to provide breastfeeding education and support. DC WIC staff shared that many mothers returned to work early to financially support their families and did not have access to breast pumps or adequate breastfeeding assistance.



## Key Recommendations DC Health – Title V Maternal and Child Health Services & WIC Breastfeeding Needs Assessment:

### ➤ **Family-level Strategies**

- Provide families with prenatal breastfeeding education tailored to their learning needs.
- Establish closed-loop referral systems that connect families to lactation support across clinical and community settings.
- Support adequate paid parental leave for all working parents to support sustained breastfeeding.

### ➤ **Hospital-level Strategies**

- Strengthen breastfeeding education for hospital staff, with emphasis on practical support and competence.
- Expand access to donor milk within hospital settings, especially for infants with medical or nutritional needs.
- Ensure birth parents at risk for breastfeeding challenges are identified early and referred to lactation support services upon discharge.

### ➤ **Provider-level Strategies**

- Enhance provider education with hands-on training in breastfeeding support and counseling.
- Convene a task force led by obstetric providers to develop efficient, comprehensive models for prenatal breastfeeding education.

### ➤ **WIC-level Strategies**

- Provide hands-on breastfeeding training for all WIC staff who counsel families on infant feeding.
- Increase prenatal enrollment of birth parents in WIC to ensure early access to support.
- Improve distribution systems for breast pumps to ensure timely access for eligible families.
- Educate families about paid parental leave and workplace laws that protect time and space for milk expression.

### ➤ **Policy-level Strategies**

- Ensure all working parents have access to adequate paid parental leave.
- Educate employers, employees, and families about breastfeeding support laws and improve enforcement, including workplace accommodations for milk expression.
- Collaborate with Medicaid and other insurers to improve reimbursement for outpatient lactation services.
- Support and develop workforce strategies to integrate more lactation specialists into outpatient care settings, with priority on those that serve the greatest number of families residing in Wards 5, 7, and 8.

The District of Columbia Breastfeeding Coalition (DCBFC) is a 501(c)(3) organization that is primarily volunteer-driven and was established in 2004 to increase the breastfeeding rates of all infants living in the District of Columbia. Working in partnership with maternal and child health professionals, community health organizations, and mother-to-mother support groups, the DCBFC seeks to promote, protect and support culturally sensitive programs and activities that build awareness and understanding of the preventive health benefits of breastfeeding. Through its breastfeeding research, advocacy and educational activities, the Coalition seeks to reduce health disparities—particularly among the most vulnerable infants and children living in our communities.

