



## UPDATES ON DATA, EDUCATION AND POLICY

### Center for Urban Child Policy

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### STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING BREASTFEEDING RATES IN SHELBY COUNTY

Conception to age three is a period of unparalleled and intense brain development, and good nutrition is one of the best ways to aid cognitive, social and emotional well-being. Human breast milk provides complete nutrition, promoting optimal physical and intellectual growth during the first months of life. This policy brief reviews breastfeeding practices in Shelby County and their implications for children and families.

Some highlights of the brief:

- » Compared to the rest of the country, breastfeeding rates are low in Shelby County and vary significantly by race.
- » A strong and growing body of evidence demonstrates that breastfeeding promotes optimal mother-child bonding and supports healthy brain development.
- » There are many community and medical resources in Memphis designed to support breastfeeding families and provide education and lactation support to new mothers.

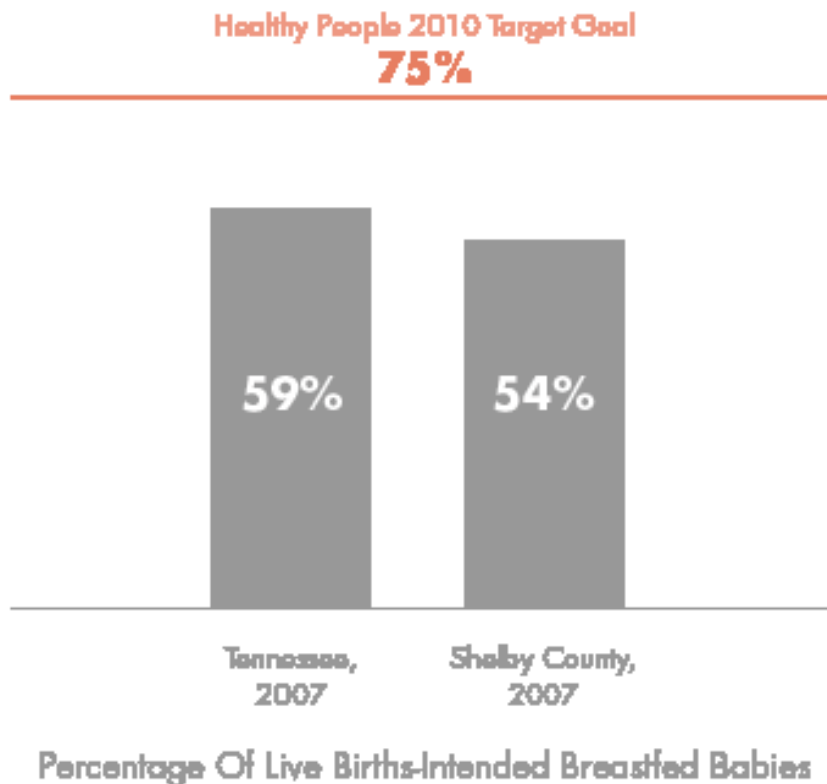
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\*This brief was created in partnership with the Shelby County Breastfeeding Coalition.  
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Breastfeeding is one of the best ways to aid optimal cognitive, social and emotional growth during early childhood. Human breast milk provides perfect nutrition for infants. A growing body of research suggests numerous benefits to children, mothers and families from breastfeeding and the use of human milk for infant feeding (AHRQ, 2007). Specific health advantages for babies include a reduction in the risk of ear infections, gastroenteritis, lower respiratory tract infections, and SIDS, as well as a reduction in the incidence of atopic dermatitis, allergies and asthma. Breastfeeding also reduces the incidence of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, childhood leukemia and hypertension. Our most vulnerable, premature infants are protected against necrotizing enterocolitis by mother's milk as well (American Dietetic Association, 2009). The scientific community has taken note, and The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) now recommends breastfeeding exclusively for six months after birth, continued breastfeeding for at least 12 months after birth, and thereafter as long as mutually desired by mother and baby (AAP, 2005).

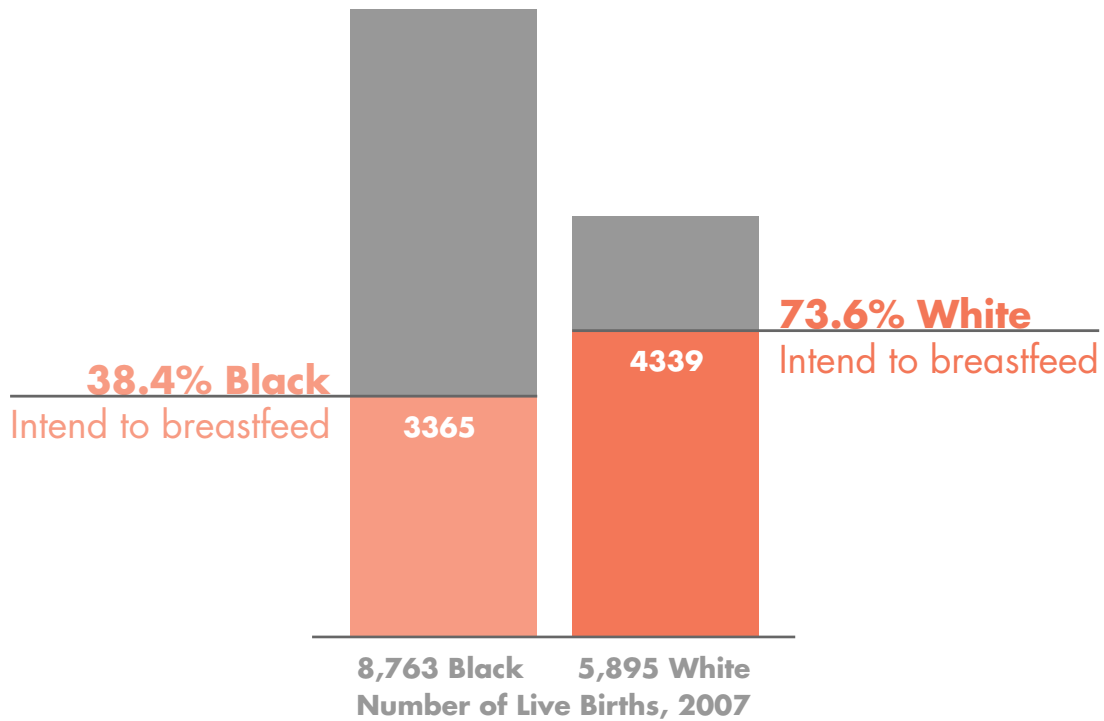
## **BREASTFEEDING INTENTION/INITIATION RATES ARE LOW IN SHELBY COUNTY AND ACROSS THE STATE.**



- » Newborn screening data indicates that 53.6% of Shelby County mothers intend to breastfeed their baby in the hospital, compared with 59.2% of all Tennessee mothers (TN Department of Health, 2007)<sup>1</sup>. Healthy People 2010, the nation's health agenda, established target breastfeeding rates of 75% at birth.
- » Meanwhile, at the national level seventy-seven percent of new mothers reported breastfeeding in 2005-2006, well exceeding the 2010 target (CDC, 2008), and far exceeding the rate of breastfeeding-at-birth in Shelby County.

**Multiple variables, such as family traditions and practices, professional guidance, and birthing facility policies lead to disparities in breastfeeding rates.**

- » White Shelby County mothers were more likely to *intend* to breastfeed their newborns (73.6% of 5,895 births) than African American mothers (38.4% of 8,763 births). Numerous factors have been offered to explain lower rates of breastfeeding among African-American mothers. These include less access to information and resources on breastfeeding, less favorable representations of breastfeeding among African-American women, and less household and network support for breastfeeding (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000).



<sup>1</sup> Mother indicated her intention to breastfeed at the time the birth certificate was completed

## **BREASTFEEDING SUPPORTS HEALTHY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT.**

- » As early as one week of age, breast-fed infants surpass formula-fed infants on behavioral assessments of orientation, motor, withdrawal and depressive behaviors (such as excessive high-pitched crying and hyperactive rooting), suggesting that breastfeeding supports early neurobehavioral development (Hart, Boylan, Carroll, Musick, & Lampe, 2003).
- » Premature infants who are breastfed exhibit increased performance on kindergarten readiness skills (including executive functioning, comprehension, and the ability to follow directions, as well as faster processing and expanded fine motor functioning) at age five (Tanaka, Kon, Ohkawa, Yoshikawa, & Shimizu, 2009). By third grade, premature infants who were breastfed enjoy an eight point advantage in IQ assessments over pre-term children who were not breastfed (Lucas, Morley, Cole, Lister, & Leeson-Payne, 1992).
- » The number of months that babies are breastfed also matters. Increased breastfeeding duration is associated with higher scores on IQ assessments in elementary school, as well as stronger reading and math scores in middle school. Increased breastfeeding duration is also associated with lower drop-out rates (Horwood & Fergusson, 1998).
- » The positive gains associated with breastfeeding appear to be independent of social class variables. Recent research on siblings suggests that one additional month of breastfeeding is associated with a rise in high school grade point average even when children grow up in the same household. These same breastfed children are more likely to attend college (Sabia & Rees, 2008).

## **Breastfeeding Promotes Optimal Mother-Child Bonding And Encourages Healthy Social And Emotional Development.**

During the act of breastfeeding, oxytocin (a hormone and neurotransmitter that induces calmness and stimulates interaction) increases in both mother and baby (Arnetz & Ekman, 2006; Klaus, 1998). As a result, breastfeeding helps to develop a strong attachment between mother and infant- a critical relationship which is strongly associated with children's healthy socio-emotional adjustment and development (Bowlby, 1973; Ijzendoorn et al., 1991).

- » Mothers who breastfeed tend to be more responsive to their infants than mothers who bottle-feed (Wiesenfeld, Malatesta, Whitman, Granrose, & Uili, 1985). Responsiveness, in turn, promotes stronger attachment and supports emotional development. Secure attachment with a primary caregiver assists children in developing a stable self-concept as someone who is valued and worthy. A secure mother-child bond can also help young children learn to trust the people they encounter as they explore the world (Bowlby, 1973).

- » Breastfeeding provides increased skin-to-skin contact between mothers and infants. Compared to mothers who use formula, breastfeeding mothers touch their infants more during both feedings and playtime (Bernal & Richards, 1970; Kuzela, Stifter, & Worobey, 1990). Mother-child skin-to-skin contact improves emotions, mood and reduces anxiety (Field et al., 1999; Field et al., 1997; Turner, Altemus, Enos, Cooper, & McGuiness, 1999).

## How Can We Improve Rates of Breastfeeding In Shelby County? (Bueno & Davidson, 2005)

1. **Begin Immediately With Pregnancy Preparation and Assistance.** Mothers are much more likely to breastfeed when they decide to do so long before their babies are born.

### *Recommendation:*

- » Support pre-natal and new parent education programs that inform expectant mothers of the benefits of breastfeeding, as well as the risks of formula feeding, and discuss apprehensions they may be having about the breastfeeding process.

2. **Enlist Medical Facilities and Health Care Providers as Allies.** Allow time for new mothers and infants to practice latching-on immediately after delivery. Discourage the practice of bottle feeding newborns when they are first taken to the nursery. Accommodating medical policies around delivery and the earliest post-birth time frame for feeding are crucial to the initial success of breastfeeding, as this is the time period in which the breastfeeding relationship is most insecure.

### *Recommendations:*

- » Work with hospitals to discontinue the practice of giving infant formula to new mothers.
- » Support the efforts of medical practitioners and hospitals to align with current policy guidelines. Encourage all birth hospitals and practicing physicians to adopt the AAP Sample Hospital Policy on Breastfeeding.
- » Promote efforts to make lactation assistance a protected asset for all women at all birthing facilities so that all mothers have access to superior breastfeeding guidance services in the hospital.

**3. Heighten Employer Support of Breastfeeding.** Tennessee employers are required to provide adequate break time and private appropriate space for mothers who wish to express breast milk. Nursing environments that include a locking door, a comfortable chair, sufficient break-time, and refrigerated storage for expressed milk, are all workplace attributes that help to facilitate continued breastfeeding after mothers return to work.

*Recommendations:*

- » Supply breast pumps to mothers who cannot afford to buy or lease them.
- » Reward employers who honor existing regulations mandating break time and suitable space to express breast milk. Recognize and reward efforts by low-wage organizations to support breastfeeding.

**4. Encourage Community Engagement.** Social support organizations, family and companions, as well as the greater community, are crucial to promoting breastfeeding. Women who are encouraged to breastfeed, and who receive the support they need to continue to breastfeed, are more likely to initiate and continue to breastfeed for longer time periods.

*Recommendations:*

- » Breastfeeding must emerge as the familiar and expected manner of infant feeding. The public must welcome breastfeeding<sup>1</sup> in public locations.
- » Throughout pregnancy and the postpartum time frame, actively engage spouses, partners and friends in doctor visits, social support consultations (i.e. consultations with WIC providers), and all breastfeeding promotion gatherings and activities.
- » Engage the faith community in supporting pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.

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<sup>1</sup> Tenn. Code Ann. § 68-58-101 et seq. (2006) permits a mother to breastfeed an infant 12 months or younger in any location, public or private, that the mother is authorized to be, and prohibits local governments from criminalizing or restricting breastfeeding. Specifies that the act of breastfeeding shall not be considered public indecency as defined by § 39-13-511; or nudity, obscene, or sexual conduct as defined in § 39-17-901. (HB 3582)

## Local Resources Designed To Support Breastfeeding Mothers

The Shelby County Breastfeeding Coalition is a county-wide collaboration that aims to implement national breastfeeding policy recommendations. The coalition is comprised of nine organizations, representing a partnership between the public and private sectors, and uniting the community with medical, academic, public health, research, and business groups. The coalition also aligns with local churches and service agencies to provide breastfeeding support and information. To find out more about the Shelby County Breastfeeding Coalition, please contact Dr. Julie Ware at [julieware2@bellsouth.net](mailto:julieware2@bellsouth.net).

LEAP (Lactation Education and Promotion) for Memphis is an affiliate of the International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA). LEAP works to foster networking of resources, promote breastfeeding locally, provide education in lactation and breastfeeding counseling, and provide lactation education and resources for the medical community. LEAP for Memphis members include International Board Certified Lactation Consultants, Certified Lactation Counselors and Educators, and other perinatal professionals who work with breastfeeding mothers. LEAP provides opportunities for continuing education hours for these professionals. For more information on LEAP or for a full listing of lactation support staff in our community, please contact Ruth Munday at [MundayR@lebonheur.org](mailto:MundayR@lebonheur.org).

La Leche League (LLL) is an international, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization dedicated to providing education, information, support and encouragement to women who want to breastfeed. All breastfeeding mothers and mothers-to-be interested in breastfeeding are welcome to contact LLL of Memphis for breastfeeding help or information. For more information, please visit <http://www.llleus.org/web/MemphisTn.html>.

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For more information on the well-being of children in Memphis and Shelby County, please visit [The Urban Child Institute](#), and [The State of Children in Memphis & Shelby County: Data Book](#).

[The Urban Child Institute \(TUCI\)](#) promotes optimal brain development for children from conception to age three. The Institute's [Center for Urban Child Policy](#) supports that mission by building our understanding of inputs to - and implications of - early brain development in our community.

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