LISTENING TO NEW HAVEN ABOUT BREASTFEEDING
Promoting Equity in Breastfeeding through Community Partnership

The Challenge
Despite similar intent, Black and Latina women breastfeed at lower rates than white women (1,2). Breastfed babies are at lower risks for infections and childhood obesity, while mothers who breastfeed are less likely to develop breast cancer and type 2 diabetes (3). In New Haven, Connecticut, where 30% of residents identify as Black or African American, and 30% identify as Hispanic or Latinx (4), it is important to work with the community to support local parents in meeting their breastfeeding goals.

The Approach
In April 2020, through the CDC’s Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program, over 70 people from more than 20 community-based organizations came together with CARE to re-launch the New Haven Breastfeeding Task Force, which supports Black and Latinx parents who breastfeed, their families, clinicians, and community members. Guided by Task Force members, CARE held focus groups and interviews with Black mothers and fathers, as well as Latina mothers, in order to understand perceptions, challenges, and facilitators of breastfeeding. CARE also conducted a Community Readiness Assessment and presented all findings to the Task Force for next steps.

WHAT IS NEW HAVEN SAYING ABOUT BREASTFEEDING?
Findings from CARE’s Focus Groups and Interviews

- Shift cultural norms to promote breastfeeding
- Improve knowledge and practice of breastfeeding-friendly policies in the workplace
- Address racial biases and increase support for breastfeeding among healthcare providers

Conducting a Community Readiness Assessment
Members of the New Haven Breastfeeding Task Force worked with CARE to assess the “breastfeeding-friendliness” of New Haven. New Haven is in the “Preplanning” stage of community readiness, where there is awareness of the need to address breastfeeding inequities, but there are not yet any focused efforts to effect change. This is a great stage at which to take action through breastfeeding-friendly programs and policies!

“You need community in order to advance together. That’s what is necessary.”
— Latina mother

Our Community Partners

WHAT IS NEW HAVEN SAYING ABOUT BREASTFEEDING?
Turning Words into Action

Shift cultural norms to promote breastfeeding

**What We Heard**
- Formula feeding is viewed as the norm in the United States
- Breastfeeding needs to be more visible in the media
- Local breastfeeding resources need to be more widely shared

**Working with the Task Force to Take Action**
- Developed new English- and Spanish-language resource guides on breastfeeding support services in Greater New Haven, which were shared with over 75 community members
- Conducted interviews with 18 New Haven residents to inform the Connecticut Department of Public Health (CT DPH) Breastfeeding: It’s Worth It! campaign

**Next Steps**
- Collaborating with CT DPH to launch a communications campaign to support breastfeeding
- Provide storefront decals to businesses that show their support of breastfeeding “any time, any place”

“I feel good when my doctor says, “Look, let’s talk about breastfeeding because it’s really important.”
– Latina mother

“I had an office that I could just go in and pump during the day. And I think having those spaces made breastfeeding a lot easier for me.”
– Black mother

“I feel like there has been an intentional push to encourage African American mothers to breastfeed their children.”
– Black mother

Improve knowledge and practice of breastfeeding-friendly policies in the workplace

**What We Heard**
- Workplaces need to be breastfeeding-friendly with clear policies in place
- Some people do not know about their employer’s breastfeeding policies and would like to know their rights
- Some businesses want to support breastfeeding but need more information and support

**Working with the Task Force to Take Action**
- Created a strategy, developed resources, and trained 11 Task Force members to encourage local businesses to become breastfeeding-friendly
  - Designed "Know Your Rights" flyers and updated "The Business Case for Breastfeeding" with the Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition (CBC)
  - Built an Employer Starter Kit for becoming a Chest/Breastfeeding-Friendly Business
- Collaborated with the CBC; the New Haven Department of Transportation, Traffic and Parking; and community partners to design a lactation room in New Haven’s local train station, with construction beginning in early 2023

**Next Steps**
- Collaborating with the CBC and other partners to create lactation rooms in more public spaces
- Assisting local businesses in receiving a Chest/Breastfeeding-Friendly Designation from the CBC, meaning that a business provides a time, space, and policy for pumping at work
- Organizing a press conference to highlight local businesses that have received the Chest/Breastfeeding-Friendly Designation

Address racial biases and increase support for breastfeeding among healthcare providers

**What We Heard**
- Mothers want and need high-quality, culturally-sensitive breastfeeding education and lactation support from healthcare providers, beginning prenatally and continuing postpartum
- Mothers recommended that healthcare providers receive more information and training on breastfeeding and unconscious bias in practices

**Working with the Task Force to Take Action**
- Funding peer counselors with lived experience to support over 331 Black mothers
- Funding the Mocha Milkshake Café breastfeeding support group, run by Earth’s Natural Touch doula service to support over 116 breastfeeding families
- Provided feedback on a “Basics of Breastfeeding training” developed by CT DPH and Connecticut Children’s Medical Center
- Created a training for healthcare providers specifically focused on the “Roots of Racial Inequities in Breastfeeding” among Black Americans, which was presented to 12 healthcare providers from 8 different offices for feedback

**Next Steps**
- Piloting the "Basics of Breastfeeding" and "Roots of Racial Inequities" trainings in clinical offices
- Getting CME accreditation for the "Roots of Racial Inequities in Breastfeeding" training in order to reach more clinicians

For more information on CARE’s Breastfeeding Initiative, please visit carenhv.org or contact CARE’s Breastfeeding Initiative Coordinator, Tomeka Frieson, at tomeka.frieson@yale.edu.
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