

# WIC Peer Breastfeeding Support Program

Minnesota WIC peer counselors improve health by increasing breastfeeding initiation, exclusivity, and duration in communities across our state. <sup>1</sup> Human milk feeding improves infants’ and parents’ health and helps families save money. It also leads to cost savings for insurers, employers, and society.

- Parents who breast/chestfeed have lower breast cancer, ovarian cancer, diabetes, and heart disease risks.
- Infants who receive human milk visit their health care provider less often, are less likely to be hospitalized, and need fewer prescriptions than formula-fed infants.
- Communities with low breastfeeding rates have higher rates of diseases that breastfeeding could prevent.

Breast/chestfeeding promotion and support is a priority for the Minnesota WIC program. Many local WIC agencies have offered peer counseling services to pregnant and breastfeeding parents since 2005.



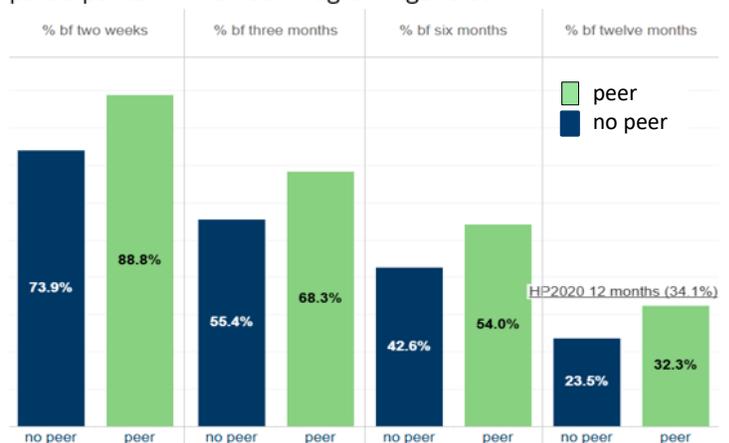
*“She has given me a lot of helpful information. Especially in the beginning when I was worried that baby wasn't getting enough. She explained that babies have small stomachs and a lot of babies are overfed. I didn't end up giving formula and I felt more comfortable.”*

Peer counselors are parents with personal experience breast/chestfeeding their own children. They are trained in the management of normal breastfeeding and in client-centered counseling skills. Peers strive to help each parent reach their personal infant feeding goals.

Peer counselors are recruited from the communities they serve and often speak the same language. They have similar life circumstances and experiences as their clients. Peers connect parent-to-parent with their clients and are a trusted source of information and support.

*“When my milk supply started to drop, [my peer] was very helpful, knowledgeable and supportive and helped me to continue breastfeeding longer than I would have alone.”*

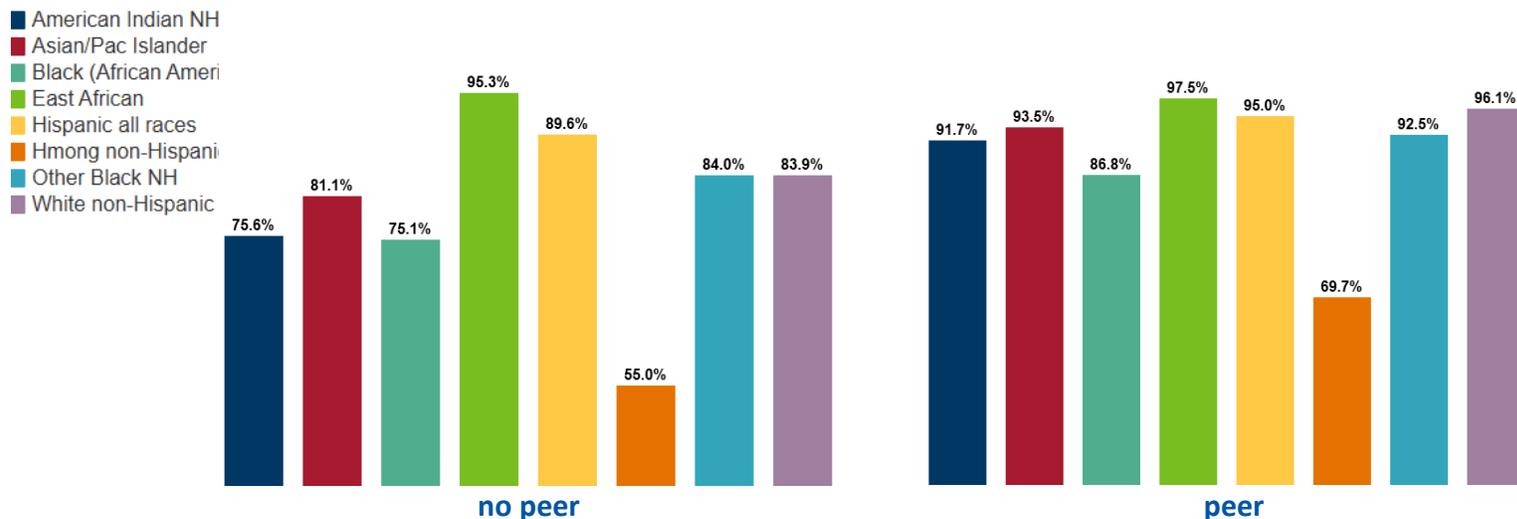
Figure 1. 2023 Breastfeeding duration among peer and non-peer participants in WIC Peer Program Agencies



Parents who had a peer, breastfed significantly longer than those who did not receive peer support (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

# Peer Breastfeeding Support Advances Health Equity

Figure 2. Breastfeeding initiation by race and ethnicity in peer agencies, 2019

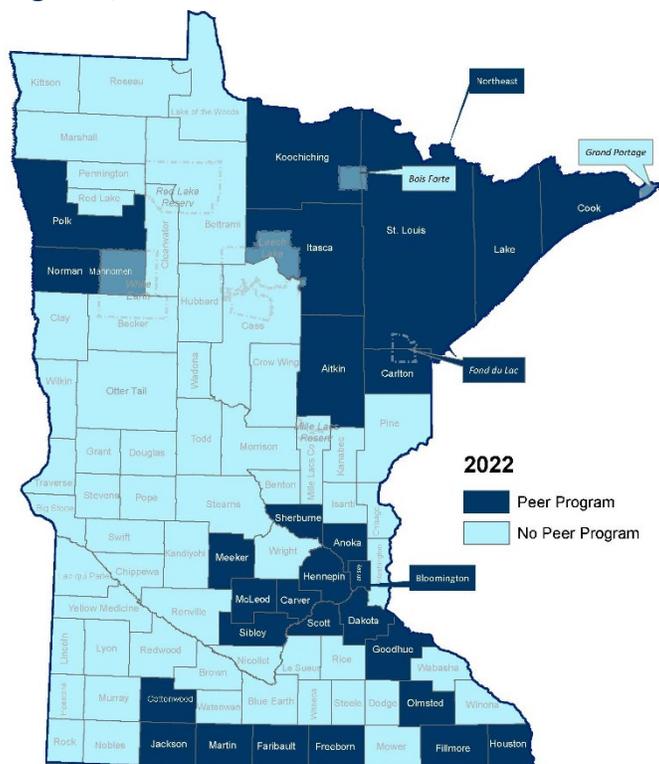


Breastfeeding rates in Minnesota vary greatly by cultural identity. Among parents who received peer services, all groups had higher initiation rates than among parents without a peer, and most exceeded the HP2020 objective of 81.9% initiation. Breastfeeding peer support is associated with significant decreases in breastfeeding disparities (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup>

## Participation in Minnesota WIC Peer Breastfeeding Support Programs, 2023

The [Peer Breastfeeding Support Program](#) served around 7,000 families in 2023, which is about 1 in 5 eligible Minnesota WIC participants. The number of peer programs increased from 14 to 18 in 2022, making services available to more WIC families.

Peer counselors receive USDA WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum training. WIC provides this curriculum to any organization wishing to provide similar services through a peer program. Contact the state WIC office for more information.



*I feel so fortunate to have a Peer Counselor on our team; her presence revitalizes our conversations about breastfeeding. Because clients ask her different kinds of questions, we get to reflect together as a staff on the whole scope of the breastfeeding experience in our area for better outreach, better messaging, and better support. –WIC Staff*

*“She’s the reason that I am breastfeeding. She told me I can do it.”*

*“I wouldn’t have breastfed for a year without the support of my Peer Counselor.”*

For more information: Minnesota Department of Health WIC Program 1-800-657-3942

- 1.McCoy MB, Geppert J, Dech L, Richardson M. Associations between peer counseling and breastfeeding initiation and duration: an analysis of Minnesota participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Maternal and child health journal. 2018 Jan 1;22(1):71-81
- 2.Minnesota Department of Health. Minnesota WIC Information System.

[WIC Peer Breastfeeding Support Program Fact Sheet](#)

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/reports/bf/info/2022peer.pdf>