

Lessons for the UK on implementation and evaluation of breastfeeding support: evidence syntheses and stakeholder engagement

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

What was the question?

We know that breastfeeding is good for the health of mothers and babies, yet many mothers experience difficulties and stop breastfeeding before they want to. This is noticeable among women living in disadvantaged areas where there are low rates of breastfeeding. Good support may help women overcome difficulties so that they can continue to breastfeed. Women with chronic illnesses such as diabetes and depression face additional challenges in breastfeeding. We wanted to understand how to improve breastfeeding support for UK women.

What did we do?

We brought together previous scientific studies to learn about what works. We also spoke with parents and service providers. We combined all our findings into a toolkit to help the NHS improve breastfeeding support for women.

What did we find?

We found that, for healthy women, some forms of breastfeeding support can probably help reduce the number of women stopping breastfeeding and help them breastfeed exclusively. For women with chronic illnesses, we found that the types of support used in the studies probably did not help women to breastfeed. Most of the evidence did not come from the UK. We identified barriers to providing breastfeeding support for all women, especially those who are disadvantaged. We identified strategies that could help the NHS overcome these barriers. There was a lack of evidence on how cost-effective these interventions are compared with usual care, but parents and providers saw the value of paying for breastfeeding support.

What does this mean?

Giving women targeted breastfeeding support will help them to breastfeed; however, we need to test if this support works in the NHS. We also need to develop additional services for women with chronic illnesses. The NHS could use our findings to improve support for all breastfeeding women by identifying specific barriers and using evidence-based strategies to overcome them.

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