



## The business case for Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation

Becoming accredited as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace displays strong leadership and makes good business sense.

Supporting mothers to breastfeed if they wish to, has been identified by health authorities as important to the health of all Australians. However, returning to the paid workforce can often act as a barrier to continued breastfeeding for many new mothers.

BFW accreditation was developed as a direct response to workplaces seeking ABA guidance and recognition of how they could support their breastfeeding employees. With the right support, breastfeeding employees can successfully combine breastfeeding and paid work.

### Why is it important to support employees who wish to breastfeed?

Many women return to work when their infant is at an age when breastfeeding is still recommended by health authorities. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that infants be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life and ongoing breastfeeding until two years of age and beyond with appropriate introduction of complementary foods.<sup>i</sup> The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) also supports this by recommending that infants be exclusively breastfed until six months of age and then continued breastfeeding until 12 months of age and beyond if both mother and infant wish.<sup>ii</sup>

Research consistently shows that breastfeeding is important for the normal growth and development of babies and the health of their mothers.

Not breastfeeding increases the risk of many childhood illnesses including gastroenteritis, ear infections, asthma, leukaemia, type 1 diabetes and allergies. Not breastfeeding increases a mother's risk of suffering cancers of the reproductive organs, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and many other illnesses.

Mothers who are not aware that their workplace will support them to combine breastfeeding and work, often feel that their only choice is to stop breastfeeding if they're returning to work, even though they might want to continue.

BFW accreditation is an innovative way for organisations to proactively demonstrate their commitment to supporting breastfeeding employees in a way that also brings tangible benefits to employees and employers.

BFW accreditation can help your organisation:

- Optimise recruitment and retention strategies
- Build your reputation as a family-friendly employer
- Enhance cost savings associated with a healthier, happier workforce
- Demonstrate your commitment to equal opportunity and workplace diversity.

## Optimises recruitment and retention strategies

- Increase employee loyalty and improve retention rates after maternity leave.
- Save \$\$ associated with recruiting and training new staff.
- Increase value proposition to employees and prospective employees without relying on salary measures.
- Increase employee loyalty and motivation, resulting in improved productivity.

A major reason for staff leaving a workplace is to seek out more suitable work-life balance.<sup>iii</sup> Costs of replacing staff are high and a New Zealand study estimated \$75,000 in savings for each employee who returns to work after maternity leave.<sup>iv</sup> Providing opportunities to balance work and family can result in increased loyalty and organisations operating under constrained remuneration conditions are looking for ways to increase their value proposition to employees without necessarily relying on salary measures.

Creating a supportive breastfeeding environment can deliver significant cost savings associated with improved retention rates, earlier return to work, duration of service, and reduced recruitment and re-training costs. Accredited workplaces are entitled to promote their status as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace in recruitment advertising and therefore employees and potential candidates can be confident about the quality of breastfeeding support provided in the workplace, making your workplace more attractive.

Formalising workplace policies through the accreditation process shows strong commitment to creating a workplace culture supportive of breastfeeding. It demonstrates transparency of process and shows you are serious about helping women balance work and family commitments. Typically, this is reciprocated through increased employee loyalty and motivation, resulting in improved productivity.

## Builds your reputation as a family-friendly employer

- Develop your organisation's reputation as a great place to work.
- Improve your organisation's ability to attract new staff.
- Clearly demonstrate your commitment to helping your employees balance work and family commitments.

Workplaces that support health develop a reputation as a great place to work. The effects of this over the longer term are low staff turnover (and the consequent reduction in the cost of hiring and training new staff) and an improved ability to attract new staff. Formalising your support with accreditation demonstrates transparency of process and shows you are serious about helping women balance work and family commitments.

## Enhances cost savings associated with a healthier, happier workforce

- Reduce sick days taken by employees due to better health of babies and mothers.
- Improve employee morale, job satisfaction and productivity.
- Improve employee engagement and loyalty leading to increased staff retention.

Research shows breastfed babies are healthier, so parents and carers require less time off work to care for sick children.

A US study reported that one-day absences to care for sick children occur more than twice as often for mothers of babies that are not breastfed.<sup>v</sup> Another study confirmed that breastfeeding mothers also enjoy better health, and should expect fewer days off due to illness.<sup>vi</sup>

Here in Australia, research has found that being aware of a workplace policy supporting breastfeeding was significantly associated with higher rates of exclusive breastfeeding. In workplaces where mothers knew there was a breastfeeding policy, 61% exclusively breastfed at six months. However in workplaces where employees were unsure or knew there was no such policy, only 34% exclusively breastfed to six months.

For those returning to work at six months or earlier, amongst the exclusively breastfeeding group the number of days off work spent caring for a sick infant was around four days since birth. This compares to seven days for those who did not exclusively breastfeed at six months. Those who exclusively breastfed for six months and returned to work when their baby was between seven and 12 months old, reported fewer hospitalisations of their infant.<sup>vii</sup>

Companies that provide support for breastfeeding have consistently reported improved morale, better satisfaction and higher productivity.<sup>viii</sup>

Whilst the research available is limited, it stands to reason that support programs for breastfeeding result in significant benefits in employee engagement and loyalty.

Some research has found that women who are supported in breastfeeding their babies by their employer are more likely to return to work after maternity leave.<sup>ix</sup> Studies of several companies with breastfeeding programs in the US showed a retention rate of 94% post maternity leave.<sup>x</sup>

Having a breastfeeding policy that is regularly communicated to all stakeholders is a key requirement of being an accredited workplace. In addition, the continued relationship that exists between the accredited organisation and the BFW team ensures that workplace support for breastfeeding doesn't slip off the agenda.

## Demonstrates your commitment to equal opportunity and workplace diversity

- Enhance your organisation's reputation as a family-friendly employer.
- Support your status as an employer of choice and increase the talent pool during recruitment.
- Promote equal employment opportunity and enhance your status as a socially responsible employer.
- Helps to meet your organisation's obligations in the legislative framework.
- Clearly demonstrate your strong commitment to the health and wellbeing of your employees.

Many organisations are striving for 'employer of choice' status – a sound strategy, as being a stand-out employer increases the talent pool during recruitment. Family-friendly strategies generate an enhanced reputation for the employer, resulting in increased quantity and quality of applicants. Many BFW accredited workplaces have the coveted citation as an 'Employer of Choice for Gender Equality' as awarded by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

*"What do we get for [having a health and wellbeing program]? We get a more productive workforce. More importantly, we get a reputation as a really good place to work that cares about their staff and so people want to work here. So we get to cherry pick the best out of the employment pool."<sup>xi</sup>*

By offering breastfeeding support in the workplace, your organisation is also promoting equal employment opportunity and enhancing your status as a socially responsible employer. In particular, accredited workplaces have found that participation in the BFW accreditation program assists them in meeting their obligations in the legislative framework, in particular the Sex Discrimination Act 2010 (Commonwealth), Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Victoria) and Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (Commonwealth).

Gaining accreditation from the ABA as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace clearly demonstrates a strong commitment to the health and wellbeing of pregnant, potentially pregnant, and breastfeeding employees.

Further information about BFW accreditation can be found at [www.breastfeeding.asn.au/workplace](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/workplace)

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- <sup>i</sup> World Health Assembly (Fifty Fourth) 2001, Infant and Young Child Nutrition: Resolution 54.2.
- <sup>ii</sup> National Health & Medical Research Council, (2003), Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia incorporating the Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers: 287.
- <sup>iii</sup> Family Matters No. 61 Autumn 2002 Australian Institute of Family Studies, "Family Friendly Workplaces – a tale of two sectors" Jenny Earle, Page 16
- <sup>iv</sup> (EEO Trust. (2001). New Zealand's Best Employers in Work and Life 2001. Auckland, NZ.)
- <sup>v</sup> 4 Cohen R, Mrtek MB, Mrtek R (1995) Comparison of Maternal Absenteeism and Infant Illness Rates Among Breast-feeding and Formula-feeding Women in Two Corporations. *American Journal of Health Promotion* 10(2): 148-15
- <sup>vi</sup> Labbok MH (2001). Effects of breastfeeding on the mother. *Pediatric Clinics of North America* 48(1):143-58
- <sup>vii</sup> Smith, J.P., McIntyre, E., Craig, L., Javanparast, S., Strazdins, L, & Mortensen, K. (2013). Workplace support, breastfeeding and health. *Family Matters* 93: 58-73.
- <sup>viii</sup> Galtry, J. (1997). Lactation and the labor market: breastfeeding, labor market changes, and public policy in the United States. *Health Care Women Int.*, 18, 467-480.
- <sup>ix</sup> Payne, D., & James, L. (2008). Make or break Mothers' experiences of returning to paid employment and breastfeeding: a New Zealand study. *Breastfeeding Review*. 16 (2), 21: 2-27.
- <sup>x</sup> Ortiz J, McGilligan K, Kelly, P (2004) Duration of Breastmilk Expression Among Working Mothers Enrolled in an Employer-Sponsored Lactation Program. *Paediatric Nursing* 30(2): 111-119.
- <sup>xi</sup> "Workplace Health Promotion – Case studies for providing a supportive environment for health" State of Victoria – Department of Health 2011 Dr. Virginia Dickson-Swift, Karen Marshall, Dr. Chris Fox, Dr. Jon Willis. Page 20.