

FACT SHEET: Health Plan Coverage of Breastfeeding Support



Most women are generally aware that breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition for most infants, but they often lack specific information and are uncertain of what to expect. Even though breastfeeding is often described as “natural,” it is also an art with **specific skills and techniques that may need to be taught**. Unfortunately, breastfeeding education is not always readily available or easily understood. Many rely only on books, pamphlets, and other written materials, and increasingly on unreliable online sources. Moreover, women who encounter **problems early on are less likely to continue to breastfeed without assistance**. Most problems, if identified and treated early, need not pose a threat to successful continuation, yet women report receiving conflicting problem-solving advice from clinicians. Meanwhile, in the absence of paid family leave, many mothers will **return to work or school and need an electric breast pump** to pump quickly and efficiently during breaks to keep up supply.

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding and the Institute of Medicine report, *Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention*, call for provision of information on breastfeeding and the availability of related classes, as well as access to professional and peer support and counseling, for pregnant women and new mothers.

Benefits for Insurers

A recent study in North Carolina estimated an annual cost of \$4.77 million for Medicaid coverage of lactation counseling, with an **associated savings of \$7 million from the prevention of three diseases** and conditions impacted by breastfeeding. A similar study in Kansas estimated an annual cost of \$2.1 million for the Medicaid coverage, with an associated savings of \$3 million from the prevention of four diseases and conditions.

Federal Legislation Overview

Section 2713 of the Public Health Service Act, as added by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), requires health plans to provide benefits without cost-sharing for certain preventive services. **Breastfeeding falls within two areas:** 1) Evidence-based items or services with an A/B grade from **U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF)**, described below; and 2) evidence-informed **preventive care and screening for women** under guidelines supported by HRSA (includes comprehensive lactation support services, including counseling, education, and equipment and supplies).

Demonstrated Effectiveness & Support

The USPSTF has found that primary care interventions to support breastfeeding increase breastfeeding rates, giving this service a B grade. This recommendation specifically includes **professional support, peer support, and formal education** during pregnancy and through the early life of the child. In addition, major medical associations including the American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and American Academy of Family Physicians call for the provision of breastfeeding education and support and appropriate breast pumps.

Breastfeeding families simply cannot afford to lose insurance coverage of breastfeeding counseling and supplies: please maintain health plan coverage of preventive services without cost-sharing, and align Medicaid coverage to ensure equitable access for all.

U.S. Breastfeeding Committee • www.USBreastfeeding.org

