

**Correspondence with the BC Ministry of Health
Re: Pandemic Effects on Breastfeeding Families**

Including:

- April 20, 2020 Letter from Tina Revai, BCLCA President
- May 4, 2020 Email to Ministry of Health with link to Change.org survey
- May 7, 2020 Response from MoH, Thomas Guerrero Executive Director
- May 15, 2020 Response from BCLCA



April 20, 2020

Hon. Adrian Dix
British Columbia Minister of Health
Room 337 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Dix,

Subject: Pandemic Effects on Breastfeeding Families

British Columbia Lactation Consultants Association (BCLCA) is a registered society made up of International Board Certified Lactation Consultants* (IBCLCs) and others working to protect, support, and promote breastfeeding in our province.

We imagine that attention to vulnerable groups is being carefully balanced with the need to protect the health of all British Columbians in light of the current state of emergency. Understandably changes to healthcare programming and services have been implemented across the province in response to the coronavirus pandemic. However, access to high quality breastfeeding support across regions and within healthcare programming was inconsistent prior to the crisis. Thus, the current situation has only exacerbated the pre-existing lack of support through re-deploying public health resources and social distancing, making it even more difficult for breastfeeding families to achieve their infant feeding goals.

Yet when breastfeeding is going well, it provides a vital safety net to families by ensuring a safe, secure, reliable food source, providing immunological support to the infant and down regulating the stress response for both the breastfeeding parent and the nursing. In response to effects we are seeing as a result of the lack of support for breastfeeding families, BCLCA is advocating for changes to service in key areas in order to minimize

the potential for long-term negative effects (for full discussion see: [BCLCA Position Paper](#)). In particular, we ask for ***the immediate provision of universal access to lactation consultant (IBCLC) services through 811 or by creating a dedicated provincial infant feeding support line, similar to what is available in [Ontario](#).***

We appreciate the tremendous amount of work that you are undertaking in these unprecedented times and that your government has demonstrated a commitment to the health and wellbeing of families. This is critical because the decisions made

today regarding care, resource allocation, and support will have lasting impacts on the health of the next generation.

Our organization looks forward to the opportunity to work with you at this difficult time and will be pleased to see the resources needed to support families allocated immediately in a way that is safe and accessible for families across our province. If we can do anything to help you, please let us know.

Sincerely,



Tina Revai, RN, MN, IBCLC
President, BCLCA
On behalf of myself and the BCLCA Board

* International Board Certified Lactation Consultant – An IBCLC is a board certified professional member of the healthcare team who has earned and maintains evidence informed knowledge and expertise in breastfeeding management and care.

From: tina west <tina_west@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 4, 2020 12:06 PM
To: HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca <HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: Re: Breastfeeding services in key areas needed during pandemic

Dear Minister Dix,

I am following up on our previous email sent April 20, 2020.

Further to our request for the addition of key breastfeeding services during the pandemic, attached is over 600 signatures to a petition in support of our policy paper and action plan: <https://www.change.org/p/british-columbia-government-increased-services-for-breastfeeding-families-particularly-during-covid-pandemic>.

We look forward to your response.

Tina Revai
President, BCLCA
www.bclca.ca

From: HLTH HSD HLTH:EX <Hlth.HSD@gov.bc.ca>
Sent: Thursday, May 7, 2020 10:49 AM
To: tina_west@hotmail.com <tina_west@hotmail.com>
Subject: Ministry of Health Response - 1163216

1163216

Ms. Tina Revai
President
British Columbia Lactation Consultants Association
tina_west@hotmail.com

Dear Ms. Revai:

Thank you for your email of April 20, 2020, regarding breastfeeding and lactation supports for mother -infant dyads amidst the current COVID-19 pandemic. I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health and Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry.

The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) is dedicated to protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding and strives to ensure adequate breastfeeding and lactation support to promote optimal breastfeeding outcomes. Additionally, we recognize the important role breastfeeding and breastmilk plays in the current context. Breastfeeding support continues to be offered 24/7 through HealthLinkBC which allows those living in BC to call in toll-free and speak with a specially trained health service navigator, registered nurse, registered dietitian and licensed pharmacist about any breastfeeding questions or concerns they may have. Please see HealthLinkBC's website at: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/breastfeeding> or call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for the deaf and hard of hearing) if you have questions.

The Ministry and the Provincial Health Services Authority have published resources and information to ensure that residents have access to up to date, evidence informed breastfeeding content in these uncertain times. We will continue to support this work as this situation unfolds.

Thank you for your efforts to protect breastfeeding and raise concerns about sub-optimal breastfeeding outcomes amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry will take your considerations into account when moving forward with this work.

I appreciate the opportunity to respond, and hope you find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

Thomas Guerrero
Executive Director

Improvement through every concern.

Patient and Client Relations
Corporate Issues and Client Relations
Ministry of Health

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From: tina west <tina_west@hotmail.com>
Sent: Friday, May 15, 2020 4:15 PM
To: HLTH HSD HLTH:EX <Hlth.HSD@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: Re: Ministry of Health Response - 1163216

Dear Mr. Guerrero,

Thank you for your response.

We are heartened to hear that the Ministry of Health is dedicated to protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding and strives to ensure adequate breastfeeding and lactation support to promote optimal breastfeeding outcomes. However, it remains that access to high quality service that supports families when they need it, has been inconsistent across the province. Some areas and programs have access to the services of an [International Board Certified Lactation Consultant](#) (IBCLC), which has a strong evidence base for producing [evidence based, respectful breastfeeding outcomes](#), while many areas have no access to this service.

BC Lactation Consultant Association represents breastfeeding supporters across the province. Largely, as a group, most of us have a healthcare profession background, and most members are IBCLCs. We are familiar with the services of 811 which provides access to trained health service navigators, registered nurses, registered dietitians and licensed pharmacists. While these professionals may contribute to the care of a family struggling (for example after an early discharge due to the pandemic or who may live remotely), they do not have the same level of knowledge, skills, and expertise as an IBCLC. From the perspective of both best practice and equity of access, it is a more than reasonable request to add IBCLC service to 811.

Unfortunately your response gives the impression that there is a lack of understanding of the critical value that IBCLCs bring to the care team. We request a meeting with the Minister to discuss the [missed opportunity](#) that under-utilization of our skill set continues to have on breastfeeding outcomes across the province.

Tina Revai
President, BCLCA
www.bclca.ca