



Strengthening Midwifery Globally

## Breastfeeding

# Position statement

### BACKGROUND

Breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants; it is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of mothers. Breast milk provides all the energy and nutrients that the infant needs for the first months of life. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months or longer is the optimal way of feeding infants. To enable mothers to establish and sustain exclusive breastfeeding, important actions are initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of life and support of breastfeeding on demand.

Breast milk promotes sensory and cognitive development, and protects the infant against infectious and chronic diseases. Breastfeeding contributes to the health and well-being of mothers, by helping to space births and reducing the risk of ovarian cancer and breast cancer. It is a secure way of feeding and is safe for the environment.

While breastfeeding is a natural act, it is also a learned behaviour. Mothers require active support for establishing and sustaining appropriate breastfeeding practices. While improved maternity services help to increase the initiation of exclusive breastfeeding, support throughout the health system is required to help mothers sustain exclusive breastfeeding.

### STATEMENT OF BELIEF

ICM believes women and families have a right to receive accurate information about the benefits of breastfeeding and its management, so that they can make an informed decision on how their newborn baby will be nourished. ICM also supports the recommendation of the World Health Organization for exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Further, the Confederation supports the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 24 in its aspirations for the health of children.

### POSITION

The ICM will:

- actively work with other international organisations in the promotion of breastfeeding
- ensure that the scientific programme for each International Congress contains a component assigned to presentations on breastfeeding, including developments relating to HIV/AIDS
- utilise its communication channels with midwifery associations to keep them informed on developments in breastfeeding and lactation
- ensure that, within any document relating to the provision of care to women and their newborn, there will be an element relating to the role of midwives in protecting, supporting and promoting breast feeding.

## **GUIDANCE TO MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS**

Member associations are urged to:

- work with other organisations within their nations to promote and support breastfeeding
- provide their midwife members with up-to-date evidence on breastfeeding and on the developments relating to HIV/AIDS, lactation and breastfeeding
- encourage their midwife members to educate other health professionals in the importance of breastfeeding
- ensure midwifery education programmes contain adequate provisions for students to gain competency in supporting breastfeeding women
- encourage their midwife members to accept their unique and vital role in the promotion of breastfeeding at all levels of the communities within which they live
- proactively seek government legislation that promotes breastfeeding.

## **OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS**

- UNICEF. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).
- WHO/UNICEF. Protecting, Promoting and Supporting Breast Feeding (1989).
- UNICEF. Innocenti Declaration on the Promotion and Support of Breast Feeding (1990).
- WHO/UNICEF. Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (1990)
- WHO. WHA Resolution 54.2 Infant and young child feeding (2001)

**Adopted at Brisbane Council meeting, 2005**

*Due for next review 2011*