

# Office of Health Equity

## Veterans Health Administration

### Department of Veterans Affairs



## LACTATION SUPPORT AND MATERNITY CARE COORDINATION

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### INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is increasingly diverse. Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a major tenet of the VA healthcare mission. The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities and achieving health equity for all Veterans, including pregnant and lactating Veterans.

Veterans of childbearing age represent one of the fastest growing populations utilizing Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare. The VA pays for all Veterans to obtain this care outside of the VA regardless of service-connected disability. These benefits start when pregnancy is confirmed and extend to one year postpartum.

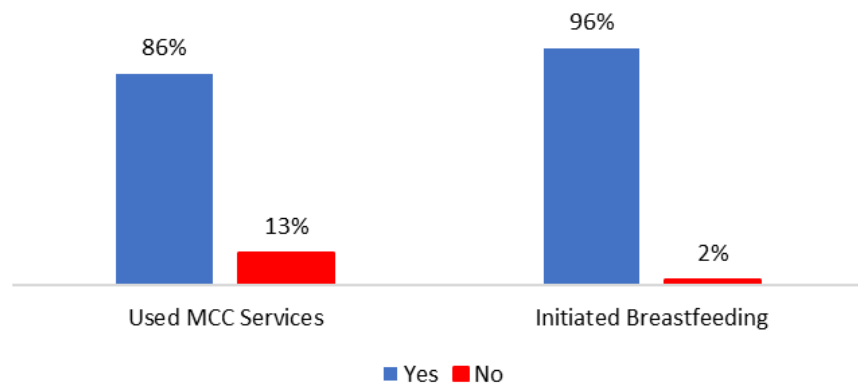
### HEALTH DISPARITIES

One health benefit available to all pregnant Veterans enrolled in VA care is maternity care coordination (MCC). MCC helps pregnant Veterans manage their perinatal health, VA primary and specialty care, and non-VA obstetric care. Lactation support services are an integral part of MCC, and include supplying breast pumps, nursing bras, and referrals for community-based lactation services.

In a cohort of over 300 pregnant Veterans across 15 VA Medical Centers, nearly all (86%) used MCC services during their pregnancies. This cohort was racially and ethnically diverse (44% identifying as Black, Indigenous, People of Color

(BIPOC) and 23% Hispanic) and 96% initiated breastfeeding/chestfeeding after their baby was born.

### Percent of Pregnant Veterans Who Used MCC Services & Percent of Pregnant Veterans Who Initiated Breastfeeding



From Inderstrod, et al., 2023



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## REDUCING DISPARITIES

Deciding how to feed an infant is a very personal decision that parents make. There are many health benefits associated with lactation and providing human milk to infants. Regardless of whether an infant is human milk fed or not, the VA provides support during the entire journey. There are a variety of services and resources available for success.

When Veterans who recently gave birth were asked why they chose to breastfeed or not and what factors influenced their choice about breastfeeding their baby, there were four primary factors that influenced their choices:

1. how breastfeeding/chestfeeding impacts the health of baby and mother
2. whether the Veterans were able to breastfeed/chestfeed,
3. Veterans' early postnatal experiences breastfeeding/chestfeeding, and
4. the cost of formula and convenience of breastfeeding/chestfeeding or bottle feeding.

VA Lactation Program (VALP) educates and supports Veterans with meeting their breastfeeding/chestfeeding goals. The program

expands and standardizes lactation support services to provide quality and equitable care to all Veterans. VALP with the support of the Office of Women's Health continues to expand and grow across VA. As a result, many VA facilities now offer internal lactation services and programs. MCCs and other VA personnel are being trained as certified lactation consultants (CLCs) and international board-certified lactation consultants (IBCLCs) so that lactation support can be provided within VAs. For those facilities that do not have onsite lactation services available, Veterans can be referred through the VA's Community Care program.



**For more information about resources available on VA Lactation Program visit this [Lactation - Women Veterans Health Care \(va.gov\)](#)**

**For more information about the Office of Health Equity visit: <https://www.va.gov/healthequity/>**

### References

Inderstrod, J., Vargas, S., Stryczek, K.C., Crawford, J.N., Hooker, T., Marteeny, V., Wallace, K.F., Kroll-Desrosiers, A., Mattocks, K. (2023) Facilitators and Barriers to Breastfeeding among Veterans Using Veterans Affairs Maternity Care Benefits. (manuscript under review).