

Breastfeeding Peer Counselor

Policy

USDA Breastfeeding and Policy Guidance:

4.3 – The definition of a peer counselor is essential to the integrity of the BFPC (*Breastfeeding Peer Counseling*) program. The *Loving Support* Model requires that peer counselors be paraprofessionals recruited and hired from the target WIC population and available to WIC participants outside usual clinic hours and outside the WIC clinic environment. The definition of a paraprofessional in this context is an individual without extended professional training in health, nutrition, or the clinical management of breastfeeding who is selected from the group to be served, and trained and given ongoing supervision to provide a basic service or function. Paraprofessionals provide specific tasks within a defined scope of practice. They assist professionals, but are not licensed or credentialed as healthcare, nutrition, or lactation consultant professionals. Therefore, IBCLCs (*International Board Certified Lactation Consultants*), registered dietitians, nurses and other licensed and credentialed health professionals do not meet the definition of a peer counselor in the *Loving Support* Model.

Authority

Breastfeeding Policy and Guidance (July 2016): Chapter 4, 4.3 Definition of a WIC Peer Counselor

Procedures

Qualifications

Breastfeeding Peer Counselors must:

- Have personal experience with breastfeeding at least one baby
- Be a Paraprofessional from the priority audience based upon the *Loving Support* Model
 - An individual without extended professional training in health, nutrition, or the clinic management of breastfeeding
 - Member of the priority group being served and/or speaks the language needed to appropriately serve participants from the community
 - Must currently be a WIC participant or must have been a WIC participant in the past and must have successfully breastfed at least one baby for a minimum of four months.
- Upon hire, receives training from the *WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum* and is provided with ongoing support and supervision.

Responsibilities

A Breastfeeding Peer Counselor's responsibilities include, but is not limited to the following:

- Provide peer support to prenatal and postpartum WIC participants through basic breastfeeding information and encouragement
- Available to WIC participants outside of the clinic environment and usual clinic hours.
- Supports WIC participants via telephone as well as face-to-face visits.
- Refers WIC participants to the WIC Designated Breastfeeding Expert, Competent Professional Authority (CPA) or other health or social service agency as appropriate.
- Ensure participant confidentiality is maintained
- Maintain accurate records of all contacts made with assigned mothers and complete required reports.

Training

Training for the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Completion of training requirements as discussed in the policy "Local Agency Personnel Training", "Training and Education Record", and "New Employee Training Checklist".
- Training with a standardized Curriculum based on the *WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum* and its updates.
- Receive training on the WIC data system
- Attend scheduled Breastfeeding Peer Counselor group meetings.
- Attend breastfeeding conferences/workshops as appropriate.

Best Practices

The following skills are desirable for a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor:

- Enthusiasm about breastfeeding and desires to help mothers enjoy a positive breastfeeding experience
- Good communication skills
- Basic computer skills
- Demographic similarities with the WIC participants served by the local agency such as age, ethnicity, and language