

NEW SURVEY ON ATTITUDES TOWARD INFANT FEEDING: TAKEAWAYS FOR POLICYMAKERS

A new bipartisan poll¹ explores the factors influencing how mothers and caregivers feed their babies. For the first time, the survey spoke not only to mothers, but also to fathers and other infant caregivers. It finds that while most see breastfeeding as the healthiest option, they also encounter barriers to doing so and want to make an informed choice about how they feed their children.

4 Takeaways for Policymakers

1. Most mothers and caregivers choose breastfeeding.

- A large majority of mothers (75%) and fathers/other caregivers (66%) know breastfeeding is healthier for their babies. This knowledge cuts across race, socio-economic status, and age.
- About a third (34%) breastfeed exclusively in the first six months, up slightly since 2012, while 76% feed their baby some breastmilk.
- A majority of mothers (89%) and fathers/other caregivers (83%) feel judged for their feeding choices, though maintain this is their own personal decision.

2. But many report significant barriers to exclusive breastfeeding.

- As in previous surveys², moms who move from breastfeeding to formula feeding tend to do so because they were not producing enough milk or faced other physical problems breastfeeding.
- But there are also other challenges: 72% of mothers say not having time to pump at work creates a barrier to breastfeeding; 71% say just returning to work or school is a barrier; and 67% say employers not supporting pumping at work is a barrier (even though the Affordable Care Act mandates employers provide workplace lactation support for hourly workers).

3. Mothers and caregivers rely on both health professionals and government for information.

- While health professionals are seen as the top source of information around infant feeding, many also rely on government outreach via a Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinic or websites like the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Health and Human Services (HHS) or state health departments.

4. Majorities believe the government should provide easy-to-understand and science-based information and resources beyond just breastfeeding.

- By a 2-to-1 margin, mothers and caregivers believe the government should provide information on a variety of healthy ways to feed infants – including both breastfeeding and infant formula feeding – rather than that the government promoting breastfeeding exclusively.

¹ GQR and Public Opinion Strategies conducted a poll of mothers and caregivers that fielded from February 27 to March 11, 2019. The sample of mothers who had given birth in the last 12 months was conducted mostly online (n=800), with a few cell phone interviews (n=2); demographic controls based on the American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau were used to ensure representation. The sample of 400 caregivers was also conducted online; caregivers were defined as spending more than 30 hours per week caring for an infant under 12 months old, outside of commercial day care.

² GQR conducted a poll of n=876 mothers who had given birth in the last 12 months that fielded from May 17-28, 2009, and again with n=1,001 mothers, including an oversample of n=210 Hispanic mothers, from August 8 – September 3, 2012.