

# Breastfeeding-Friendly Public Spaces

## A Toolkit for Local Governments



# Acknowledgments

This toolkit was created by Jennifer Fix, MCIP RPP, Principal, at [Ahne Studio](#).



## Project Leadership and Coordination

Leads for this project: Kelly MacDonald and Tanya Osborne, Interior Health (IH) Community Health Facilitators, and Karen Graham, IH Public Health Dietitian and Coordinator of the [Breastfeeding Systems Change Project \(BFSCP\)](#).

This toolkit was created as part of the KCR Community Resources (KCR) and IH BFSCP, in response to one of 15 recommendations from the [Breastfeeding Journey Mapping](#). This recommendation states: "Take steps to normalize and support breastfeeding in public and in work places."

## Renderings and Graphics

Urban design renderings on the cover and in Part 3 were created by Matthew Thomson, Landscape Architect and Urban Designer, at [MTD](#). The designs were informed by various sources, namely the research of Dr. Lisa Amir of La Trobe University (Melbourne) on breastfeeding in public spaces.

## Literature Review

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## Interviews

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## Review

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# Executive Summary

Breastfeeding supports optimal health for both children and the birth mother. Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, women have the right to breastfeed anywhere and at any time. Despite this, many women avoid or are uncomfortable breastfeeding in public spaces, contributing to shorter durations in the breastfeeding journey and lower breastfeeding rates. This aversion also prevents women from fully participating in civic life, which can lead to social isolation and an increased risk of mental health issues.

The development of breastfeeding-friendly spaces relies on a delicate balance between the social and built environments, over which local governments have an immense influence. Specifically, within local government, a diversity of departments and staff can play vital roles in creating and supporting breastfeeding-friendly public spaces. These professional realms range from planning and engineering, to human resources and communications. Applications span policy and programs, to engagement and infrastructure.

When local governments take action towards creating welcoming public breastfeeding spaces, they are supporting healthy child development, improved social and gender equity, climate action, and food security within their communities. Furthermore, creating breastfeeding-friendly spaces can contribute to truth and reconciliation, employment, and social connection. Everyone within government, from planners, policy and decision makers, infrastructure workers, to communications teams and front-line staff, all have a role to play.

This breastfeeding toolkit was developed through an environmental scan of research and best practice, in consultation with public health and interviews with local governments across Canada. It offers diverse tools that can be deployed by local governments in both the social and built environment realms and examples of breastfeeding supportive actions from communities across Canada. The Interior Health [Healthy Community Development team](#) can support implementation of this toolkit.



# Tools for Local Government

This table contains examples of tools that other local governments have implemented to make their communities more breastfeeding-friendly. They are listed in no particular order of priority or sequence and their nuanced application should be based on the unique circumstances and priorities of each local government.

Tool	Details	Links to Best Practices and Community Examples	Existing Tools to Leverage Impact	Page #
Resolution	Municipalities can pass a resolution to demonstrate an overarching commitment to being breastfeeding-friendly.	<a href="#">City of St. Johns</a>	Incorporate into Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)-related policies	p.16-17
Stand-Alone Policy	A policy can be adopted to broadly support breastfeeding in public spaces – specifically on municipal premises.	<a href="#">City of Penticton</a>	Official Community Plan (OCP)/ Parks Master Plan/Social Development Plan/Food policies	p.18-19
Plans	Design attributes of breastfeeding-friendly public spaces can be incorporated into Development Permit Area guidelines, Official Community Plans, area and site plans, and more.	<a href="#">City of Kamloops</a>	OCP/ Parks Master Plan/Social Development Plan/Food-related plans	p.20
Community Engagement	Inclusive engagement techniques that target breastfeeding mothers serve to incorporate their unique insights.	<a href="#">Respectful Engagement Resources</a>	Current and future engagement opportunities, plans and processes	p.21
Signage	Posters, stickers, and other signage can explicitly invite public breastfeeding.	<a href="#">Lake Country</a> <a href="#">Region of Outaouais, Quebec</a>	Capital Plan Delivery	p.22



Tool	Details	Links to Best Practices and Community Examples	Existing Tools to Leverage Impact	Page #
Staff Support + Education	Growing awareness among employees can support public breastfeeding as well as breastfeeding-friendly workplaces.	<a href="#">Nova Scotia</a> <a href="#">City of Waterloo</a>	Targeted training	p.23-24
Physical Assets	Guidelines to help design breastfeeding public spaces including: streets, parks, open spaces, community facilities, lactation rooms, Council chambers, transit, and community events. Breastfeeding-friendly measures can be incorporated into capital projects and asset management practices, ranging from project charters to pilot projects.	<a href="#">Inclusive Cities and Breastfeeding</a> <a href="#">City of Edmonton</a>	Capital Plan Delivery	p.25
Public Education Campaigns	Local government websites, social media channels, and campaigns can inform, educate, and help shift social norms around public breastfeeding.	<a href="#">City of Hamilton</a> <a href="#">City of Toronto</a>	Website and social media channels, dedicated campaigns	p.26
Public Art + Exhibitions	Municipal facilities and public art policies can introduce visual imagery to normalize breastfeeding in public.	<a href="#">Breastfeeding Art Expo</a>	Cultural Plan/Public Arts Plan	p.27
Public Space + Public Life Studies	These studies assess and evaluate existing conditions for public breastfeeding, and can be used to support future planning efforts.	<a href="#">City of Toronto</a>	Annual evaluation/reporting, capital planning	p.28

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## PART ONE

# Introduction

Messaging from the World Health Organization, Canadian health organizations, and British Columbia health authorities advocate for exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of age, and then to breastfeed in combination with other foods for at least two years. Yet in Canada, only 34% of infants are breastfed exclusively for six months.<sup>1</sup> Beyond one year of age, only 15% are breastfed.<sup>2</sup>

While the reasons mothers stop breastfeeding are multi-faceted, research shows that embarrassment about breastfeeding in the presence of other people is a significant contributing factor.<sup>3-6</sup>

## Local Government and Breastfeeding

On the surface, breastfeeding may appear to be a public health issue for infants and mothers. However, breastfeeding is an important part of community wellbeing and aligns with many goals of local governments:

### Child Health + Development

Breastfeeding supports optimal physical, emotional, and intellectual development.<sup>7</sup> It reduces risk for gastrointestinal and ear infections in infants. Infants who are breastfed for at least six months are also found to experience fewer behavioural problems in childhood and early adolescence.<sup>8</sup>

### Healthy Communities

Adults who were breastfed have decreased incidence of many cancers, infectious

diseases, asthma, obesity, and type 1 and 2 diabetes later in life.<sup>9</sup> In these ways, breastfeeding helps position an individual for improved health for life and therefore also supports healthy communities.

There are health benefits for the breastfeeding mother as well. Breastfeeding in the first six weeks following childbirth supports recovery of the mother and reduces initial postpartum complications. Over the long term, positive health benefits associated with breastfeeding include a reduction in the development of some cancers, fewer chronic diseases, and improved mental health.<sup>10</sup>

### Social Equity

Lower income and younger parents,<sup>11</sup> and People of Colour,<sup>12</sup> face greater barriers to breastfeeding. Developing safe and inclusive spaces for all breastfeeding mothers helps address social inequity. All mothers have the right to breastfeed if they so choose, and should be able to breastfeed in any space they occupy.

### Gender Equity

Barriers to breastfeeding unfairly affect women and their children. Many women experience discrimination at some point while breastfeeding in public.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, workplaces that are unsupportive to women breastfeeding or pumping at work result in women having to choose between being employed or staying at home to breastfeed their baby.



## Truth and Reconciliation

Indigenous cultures have traditionally viewed breastfeeding as a sacred relationship between the Creator, mother, ancestors, infant, and the environment.<sup>14</sup> Residential schools and the 60's Scoop resulted in the devastating loss of traditional cultural practices and the erosion of caregiving roles. This has included the undermining of community and generational support around breastfeeding.<sup>15</sup>

Creating safe spaces to breastfeed aligns with Calls to Action #18 and #19 of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#).

## Employment + Economy

Breastfeeding families may be less likely to incur direct and indirect medical expenses related to illnesses. These parents also need less time off work to care for sick children, which translates into fewer absentee days and a stronger workforce.<sup>16</sup>

## Food Security

Breastmilk is always readily available, including during times of wild fires, floods, and other disasters, and does not rely on food supply chains, contributing to infant food security for families that breastfeed.<sup>17</sup>

## Climate Action

The natural process of breastfeeding utilizes very few resources and has a small carbon footprint. Breastfeeding requires no manufacturing, no transportation, no energy to prepare, no equipment, and no industrial and plastic waste.<sup>18</sup>

Local governments have tremendous influence over the physical and socio-cultural landscapes of towns and cities. They design indoor and outdoor public spaces, regulate development, manage community assets and infrastructure, deliver services and programming, educate and engage communities, create partnerships, and advocate. Local governments are also community leaders and influencers of social and cultural change. Additionally, much of the work to create a breastfeeding-friendly community aligns with the work already undertaken by local governments. This ranges from healthy city strategies and accessibility design guidelines, to asset management and service delivery.



# Language + Gender

This Toolkit uses gendered language. The academic and lactation advocacy world is divided on how to discuss the presumed gendered aspect of feeding a baby from the body. Lactation, chestfeeding, and human milk feeding at the body are all considered interchangeable with breastfeeding. However, mother, birthing parent, parent, and lactating individual may hold different meanings for the reader and can be confusing in this type of document. Much of the research, sociocultural norms, and legal landscapes related to parenting and breastfeeding limit our ability to use gender-inclusive language to provide clear recommendations.

We recognize that trans men and non-binary individuals may not identify with words like mother, woman, and breastfeeding. We also recognize that data on the health effects of lactating, chestfeeding, or breastfeeding transgender parents are lacking. While this toolkit may use traditional terms such as mother and breastfeeding for clarity and consistency with evidence and policy, the barriers outlined and actions recommended in this toolkit can be used universally across all genders. This guide



advocates for safe, comfortable, and welcoming spaces for all individuals wanting to feed their babies at the body.

Using gender-neutral language alongside the language of motherhood is best practice when considering policy language and public facing communication.



Learn more about the relationship between lactation, chestfeeding, and gender identity [here](#).

Other lactation resources relating to transgender and non-binary parents can be found [here](#).

# Methods + Findings

## Developing the Toolkit

The tools and design elements in this toolkit were developed primarily through:

- An environmental scan of best practices among mainly Canadian local governments, health bodies, and breastfeeding advocacy organizations;
- Published and emerging research led by Dr. Lisa Amir of La Trobe University (Australia);
- Interviews with local governments and breastfeeding mothers across Canada; and
- Recommendations from this project team, which included Community Health Facilitators and population health experts.

## Key Lessons from Local Government Interviews

Seventeen (17) people were interviewed across thirteen (13) Canadian communities that were diverse in location and size, with a focus on BC communities and specifically those situated in the Interior Health Region.

Interviewees included specialists in: urban planning, social planning, urban design, accessibility, transportation, facilities, recreation, parks, public engagement, and human resources.

Interviews focused on the roles and tools that local governments have to strengthen and create breastfeeding-friendly public spaces.

Key learnings are as follows (with specific ideas and recommendations incorporated throughout the tools in Part 4).

### **There is limited work in this area from which to draw.**

There is opportunity for local governments to do more to support breastfeeding in public spaces.

Whether local governments have done some work in this area (e.g., created a general policy to support breastfeeding) or not, there is keen interest in building capacity and using this toolkit for future application.

### **Simple tools are better than complex ones.**

As such, interviewees recommend that simpler solutions (e.g., signage) are more likely to be implemented than complex ones (e.g., new requirements for rezonings).

### **Leverage existing plans, guidelines, processes, and equity/diversity/inclusion work.**

Related to the previous point, interviewees recommend leveraging existing tools that are already being regularly used. Incorporating new breastfeeding-friendly measures into existing mechanisms such as accessibility guidelines and project charters is more efficient and increases the likeliness that they will be implemented.

Voices with [different] lived experiences need to be honoured and incorporated into policy work. - City of Kamloops staff member



### Lived experiences differ for various reasons.

Interviewees pointed out that breastfeeding mothers are diverse in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, abilities, income, education, body size, and more. As such, their experiences and public space preferences are also diverse. This input aligns with the published research.

Due to this diversity, interviewees underscore the importance of ensuring that breastfeeding-friendly tools are inclusive and respond to the unique needs and aspirations of different groups. This ranges from the use of inclusive language (e.g., gender-free terms in policies) to future partnerships with governments and organizations that are representative of this diversity.

### Inclusive engagement is important, particularly for equity-denied groups.

Extending from the previous point, the participation of voices often not heard in local government processes will be important to ensure that breastfeeding-friendly measures are equitable. The inclusive participation of equity-denied groups – who can be harder to reach and face systemic barriers – in creating breastfeeding-friendly spaces is essential.



### Prioritize where breastfeeding mothers conduct their lives.

Whether it be in the form of community engagement or testing and deploying breastfeeding-friendly measures, prioritizing action in places and spaces where mothers access services, work, and play is important.

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**Local governments are feeling overly burdened with so many emergent issues. The breastfeeding tools would be great if they could be translated into Development Permit Area guidelines and Zoning Bylaw regulations that can be universally adapted... or piggybacking on and integrating with accessibility guidelines, equity frameworks, healthy city strategies, and age-friendly community plans.**

-City of Kelowna staff member

### Education and normalization are key.

Interviewees note that most communities are unaware of the issues and opportunities surrounding this topic. As such, they recommend that formal stances be taken (e.g., through breastfeeding-friendly policies), staff be educated, and the visibility of breastfeeding in public become normalized (e.g., signage).

These general lessons – as well as many specific ideas – from interviewees are woven throughout the recommended actions and tools outlined in Parts 3 and 4.

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**Breastfeeding can be intimidating for people because of their environment... A targeted awareness campaign would be useful, like signage in public spaces that says 'breastfeeding is welcome here'.**

-City of Vancouver staff member

## PART TWO

# Breastfeeding in Public

## Social Barriers

Canadian research on the social responses to breastfeeding found that there is public support for breastfeeding as long as it is visibly contained. Despite the legal right to breastfeed anywhere at any time, there is often an expectation that women should be discrete and cover their breasts, or use a private/ designated room.<sup>19</sup>

This is one way in which women's bodies – their place in public and what is seen as appropriate behaviour – are socially regulated in urban spaces.

Negative attitudes toward public breastfeeding have been attributed to the sexualization of women's breasts.<sup>20</sup> Social discomfort is in part the result of a perceived conflict between women as sexual beings and women as mothers.

Through disapproving looks, avoidances, and voyeurism,<sup>21</sup> these attitudes are transferred onto breastfeeding mothers who express feeling nervous, anxious, embarrassed, intimidated, and confused about breastfeeding in public.<sup>20</sup> As a result, many breastfeeding mothers avoid or are uncomfortable breastfeeding in public spaces.

Overt social barriers go beyond passive behaviours. Breastfeeding mothers have been directly shamed, catcalled, and asked to leave areas while breastfeeding.<sup>22</sup>

## Physical Barriers

The physical environment – often referred to as the built environment – of public places influences the likelihood of mothers to breastfeed. Factors that discourage women from breastfeeding in public outdoor locations include:<sup>23</sup>

- open and exposed spaces (e.g. extremes of heat, glare, cold, or wind)
- lack of seating including comfortable seating;
- noise;
- lack of space for strollers and companions;
- spaces without a safe and suitable environment for other young children (often siblings) to play.

For indoor public locations, discouraging factors include:<sup>23</sup>

- spaces without windows and visual interest;
- unpleasant and/or poorly maintained settings; and
- spaces that do not specify whether the room is in use.

Together with the social barriers, these obstacles prevent many women and other lactating people from participating fully in public life.

## PART THREE

# Designing Breastfeeding-Friendly Public Spaces

Research has revealed the importance of both the built environment (i.e., the designed and built tangible attributes of communities) and the social environment in making public spaces breastfeeding-friendly. In fact, the built environment itself greatly impacts the social environment, and vice versa.

## Qualities of Breastfeeding-Friendly Public Spaces

What constitutes a breastfeeding-friendly public space varies depending on the preferences of the breastfeeding mother or birth parent.<sup>24</sup> Quotes on this page are from Ahne Studio's interview with breastfeeding mothers and from Dr. Lisa Amir's unpublished research.<sup>23</sup>



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### Homebody

These mothers avoid breastfeeding in public altogether.

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There is a cultural background that we need to acknowledge as well. It's a shame to show your breasts. To open up in public open spaces, the support is not there.

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### A room of our own

These parents seek a private space such as a dedicated room.

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They have a breastfeeding room in the mall. I can use that room and don't have to nurse while everyone is around... It's a nice feature to have.

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### A quiet nook

These parents seek a semi-private space that enables some degree of privacy, while maintaining the possibility of social connection.

---

Going out in public I had to get up the nerve. [I like] nooks, places off to the side, a little bit of privacy.

---

### Out and about

These parents will breastfeed anywhere, however they still prefer comfortable spaces.

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I'd like to feed in the park but all the tables are out in the open with no shade.



Research shows there are many underlying qualities that make a space breastfeeding-friendly.<sup>29</sup> These design elements are further informed by interviews with Canadian breastfeeding mothers and health practitioners, and best practices.

## Accessible

Accessible spaces should be handy and easily identifiable by the mother. Spaces should be accessed via routes that are safe, convenient, and step-free. Doors should be easy to open when pushing a stroller, with sufficient space for stroller parking.

## Safe

Safe spaces do not expose breastfeeding parents and their children to pathogens or intimidation. Spaces should feel secure and enable the parent to look after other children while breastfeeding.

## Dignified

Dignified spaces are clean, well-maintained and pleasant, indicating that the breastfeeding mother and child are worthy. Dignified spaces match their degree of preferred privacy, according to personal, religious, or other cultural values.

**It is neither hygienic nor appropriate to ask or expect someone to breastfeed in a bathroom.**

## Comfortable and Enjoyable

Comfortable and enjoyable spaces should be visually attractive and peaceful, enabling the breastfeeding mother to relax. Spaces are not exposed to extremes of heat or cold, noise, offensive odour, stressful environments, or disapproval from others. Seating should enable the breastfeeding mother to bear the weight of the child without discomfort.

## Other

Other specific characteristics that encourage mothers to breastfeed away from home are:

- Many seating options, including those with armrests and backs for leaning back;
- Seating near pedestrian areas;
- Spaces where parents have seen others breastfeeding;
- Spaces that specifically encourage breastfeeding (e.g., through signage); and
- Specific and safe play areas for siblings of infant to engage.

**Seeing others breastfeed in public encourages and supports others to do the same.**

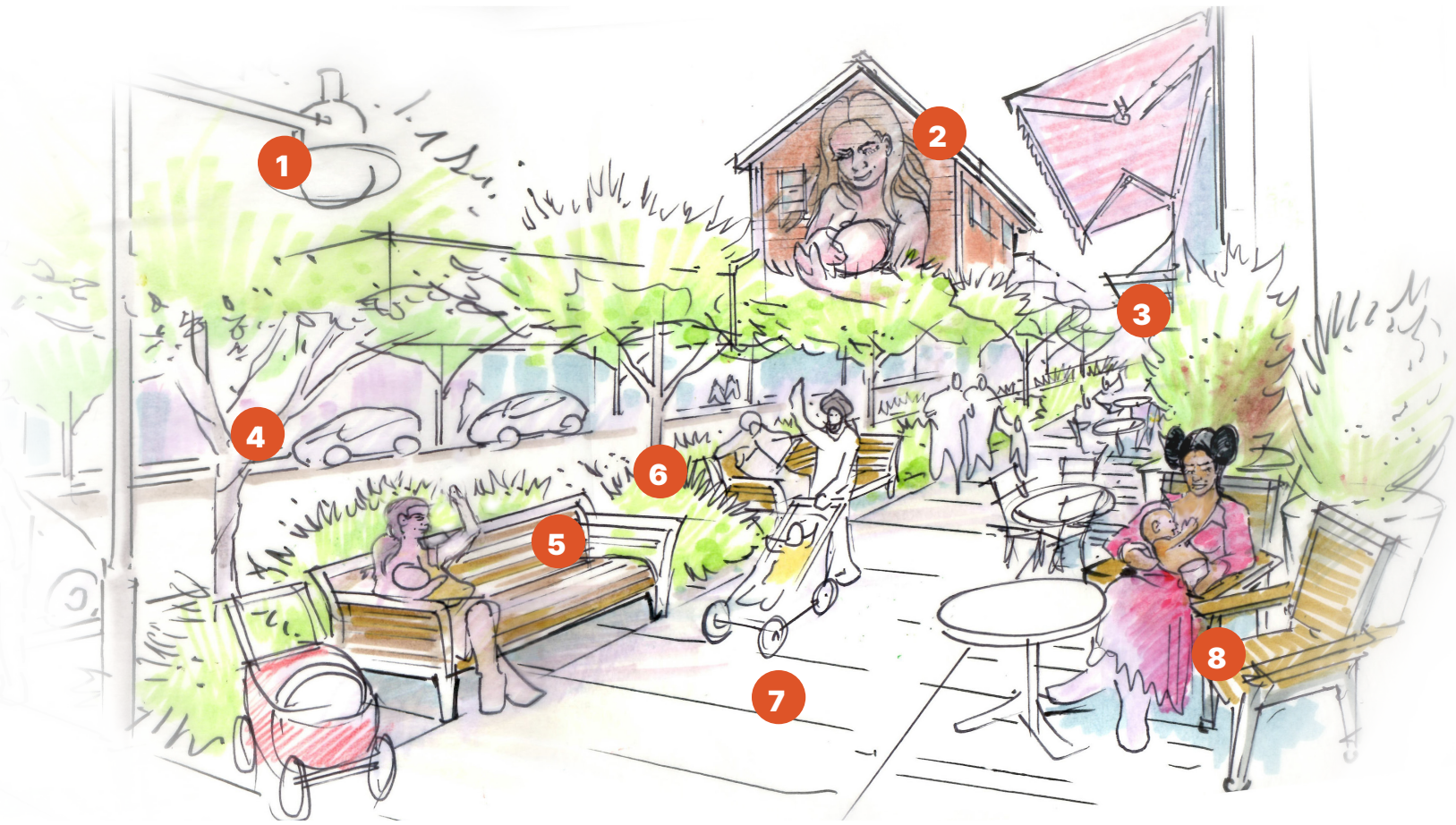
**Breastfeeding rates and duration can be increased by normalizing public breastfeeding.**



Some of these design elements involve new approaches and additional considerations to support breastfeeding-friendliness in public spaces.

On the other hand, many of these elements align with best practices and design approaches already embraced by local governments. In this way, these design elements further support existing work undertaken in communities.

# Breastfeeding-Friendly Community Design

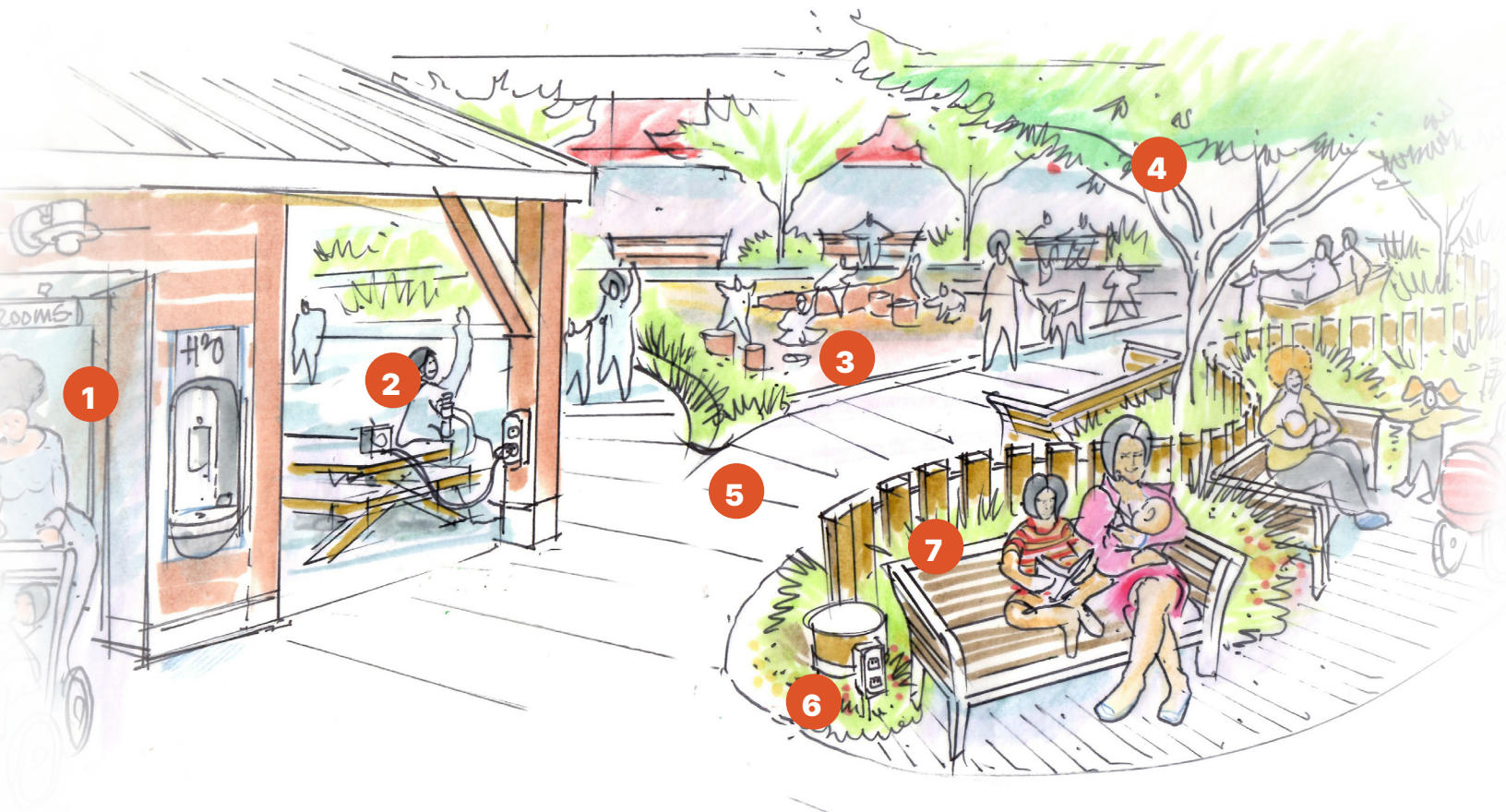


## Streets

Streets are so much more than movement corridors. They are places for public life: for walking, sitting, eating, socializing, playing, resting, breastfeeding, and more. Streets can be friendly to breastfeeding in the following ways:

- 1 Lighting** to support ease of movement and sense of safety in the evenings.
- 2 Public art** normalizing breastfeeding.
- 3 A pedestrian-scaled built form**, including entrances, visual permeability, and ideally active uses at street level.
- 4 Street trees** for shade and weather protection, and beauty.
- 5 Frequently spaced seating with high backs** for comfort, and high sides for partial screening. Materials that do not readily transfer heat or cold, such as wood, are preferred.
- 6 A landscaped screening** or other type of screening from street is preferred.
- 7 Wide, universally accessible sidewalk or walking path** for strollers and others with mobility constraints. Ample space for seating and parking of strollers.
- 8 Businesses with comfortable seats and signage** that explicitly welcomes breastfeeding.

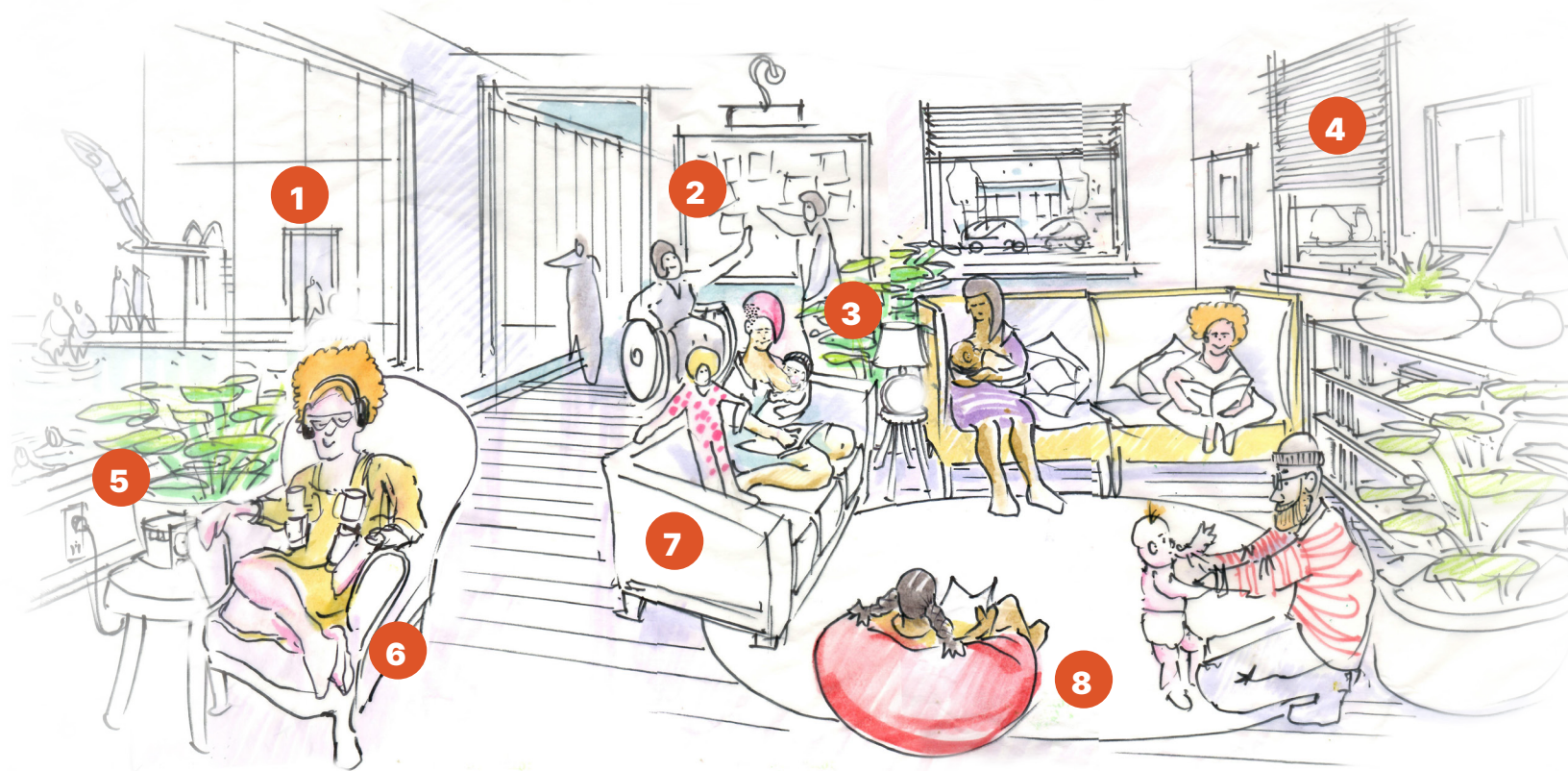




## Parks + Open Spaces

Like streets, parks and open spaces are for public life. They also tend to be places where families with small children congregate. Parks and open spaces can be friendly to breastfeeding in the following ways:

- 1 **Washrooms in close proximity to park space.** Washroom buildings should be accessible and include water fountains, baby/children change areas, and a private indoor breastfeeding space that is separate from toilet areas.
- 2 **Comfortable seating with overlook to play spaces,** so that mothers can watch other children while they breastfeed.
- 3 **Play spaces** for children, such as siblings of breastfeeding babies/toddlers.
- 4 **Trees** for shade and weather protection, and beauty.
- 5 **Wide, universally accessible sidewalk** for strollers and others with mobility constraints. Ample space for parking strollers.
- 6 **Electrical outlets** for charging phones and using breastpumps could be integrated into seating.
- 7 **Diverse seating options** with different levels of screening that appeal to a range of preferences for privacy. Opportunities for social interaction should also be provided.



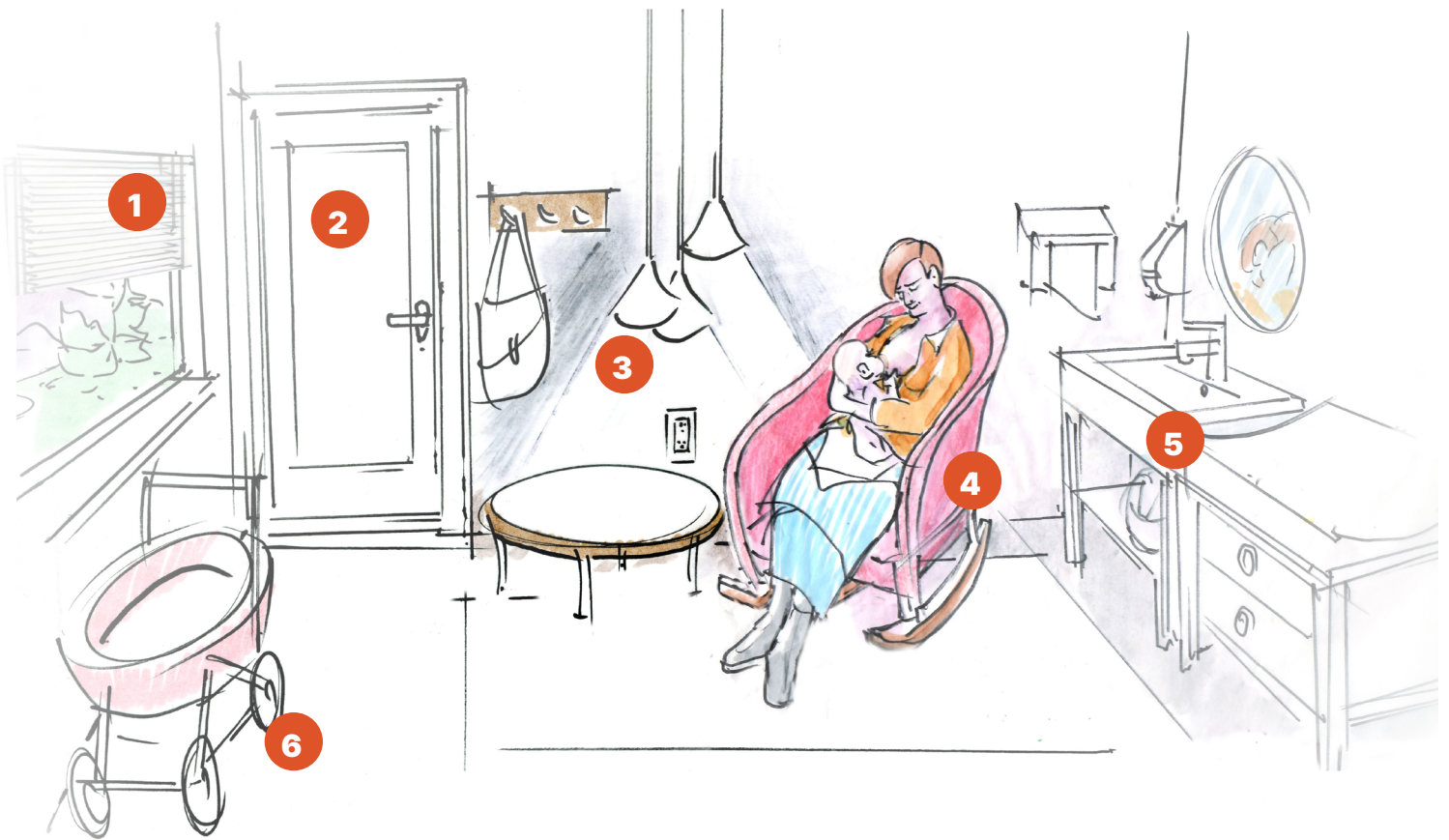
## Community Facilities

Community facilities are home to indoor public life in communities of all sizes. Through their programming and spaces, they provide important destinations for many breastfeeding parents and children. They can be friendly to breastfeeding in the following ways:

- 1 **Areas of overlook onto active spaces** such as playcourts and swimming pools where other children may be recreating.
- 2 Breastfeeding-friendly **signage**.
- 3 **Delineation of space** through plants and/or other means.
- 4 **Natural light and, ideally, views** that help foster relaxation.
- 5 **Outlets** for charging phones and using breastpumps.
- 6 **Rocking or gliding chair(s)** with armrests, and ideally a footstool, adjacent to table.
- 7 **Diversity of moveable seating** to allow for different breastfeeding positions, privacy preferences, and options for socializing.
- 8 **Play spaces for children**, such as siblings of breastfeeding babies/toddlers.





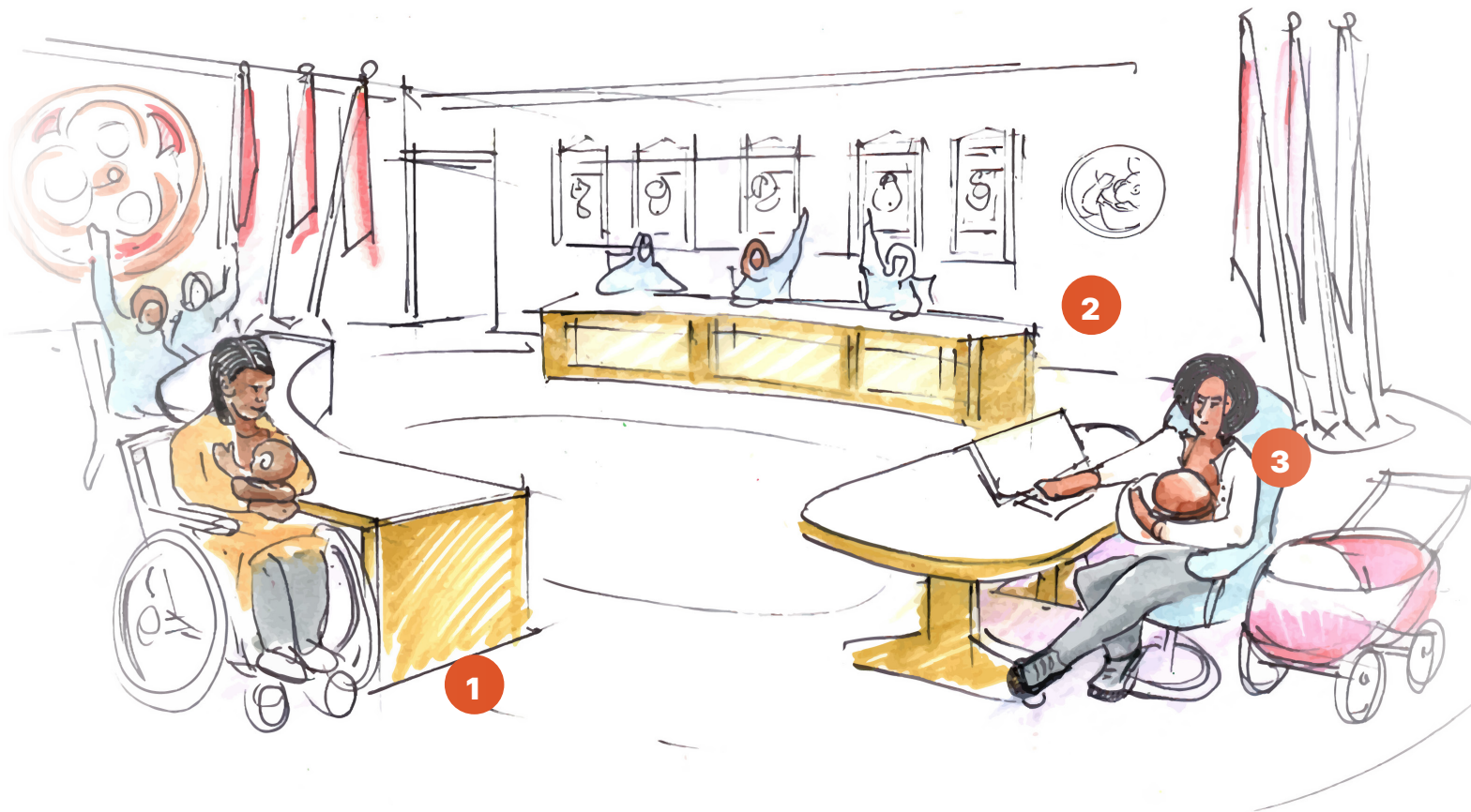


## Lactation Rooms

Dedicated rooms for breastfeeding and breastmilk pumping in civic facilities are especially important for parents who prefer a room of their own. At the same time, facilities in many small and/or rural communities may not be large enough for single-purpose rooms. In this case, rooms for lactation may have other functions, such as spare rooms or lunch rooms. These rooms can be breastfeeding-friendly in the following ways:

- 1 **Natural light and, ideally, views that help foster relaxation.** Availability of pull-down blinds so that parents can adjust lighting and privacy.
- 2 **Door that can be closed,** with sign outside indicating whether the room is in use.
- 3 **Amenities** such as dim lighting, hooks for hanging personal items, and electrical outlets for charging phones and using breastpumps.
- 4 **Rocking or gliding chair(s)** with armrests, and footstool, adjacent to table.
- 5 **Storage and washing area** for cleaning hands and breastpumps, with space for change tables.
- 6 **Ample area for stroller parking and play spaces** for children, such as siblings of breastfeeding babies/toddlers.





## Venues for Civic Decision-Making

Having those with lived breastfeeding experience sharing input and making decisions is an important part of creating change. Council rooms and venues for public engagement and decision-making can be breastfeeding-friendly in the following ways:

- 1 **Physically accessible space for breastfeeding delegates** and their strollers (as well as others with mobility limitations).
- 2 **Signage** explicitly welcoming breastfeeding.
- 3 **Mayor / Councillor breastfeeding during Council meeting**, normalizing it and demonstrating that breastfeeding is compatible with active leadership.
- 4 Ability for Councillors and delegations to **join virtually / remotely** from home (not shown).
- 5 **Flexibility permitted** for the speaker list order and timing (not shown).
- 6 **Dedicated high-quality breastfeeding room outside of venue space** (not shown). In smaller communities, there may not be sufficient space for dedicated breastfeeding rooms, in which case such rooms can be multi-purpose and shared with compatible uses. Alternatively, open areas may be screened for privacy.





## Transit

Transit is one of the most important services provided by communities, and women – who are more likely to be traveling with children – have higher levels of ridership compared with others. Transit can be breastfeeding-friendly in the following ways:

- 1 Seating with the following features:
  - moveable armrest to support arms when down, and to make room for breastfeeding child when up;
  - explicit signage indicating that breastfeeding is welcomed;
  - higher sides to enable some screening for privacy/discretion; and
  - easy access to stop button.
- 2 Ample space for strollers, with the possibility of a locking feature to secure strollers that do not have a built-in locking function.
- 3 Dedicated seating for breastfeeding parents, likely shared with other higher needs transit riders like those who are pregnant and those with mobility challenges.





# Community Events

Local governments often host community events and are responsible for indoor and outdoor venues that accommodate such events. These events include community celebrations, sporting and cultural events, parades, festivals, and more.

The ways in which these public spaces can be breastfeeding-friendly are similar to those described throughout this section, including:

- diverse seating options with
  - » weather protection (for outdoor events),
  - » various levels of screening,
  - » view to event activities / where siblings may be located, and
  - » adjacent to washrooms, change areas, water fountains, electrical outlets, and other amenities;
- dedicated breastfeeding spaces that could include single-purposes or multi-purposes rooms or screened areas;
- breastfeeding-friendly signage; and
- specific information about breastfeeding-friendly measures in event communications and advertizing, so that breastfeeding mothers are made to feel welcome and know in advance of the events how they will be accommodated.



## PART FOUR

# Tools for Local Governments

Within local government, a diversity of departments and staff can play important roles in creating and supporting breastfeeding-friendly public spaces. These professional realms range from planning and engineering, to human resources and communications. Within the parameters of these roles, local government have several tools at their disposal to shape public spaces for breastfeeding.

## Interior Health Healthy Community Development Team

Contact your local Healthy Community Development [team member](#) for support with understanding and implementing this toolkit or email [hbe@interiorhealth.ca](mailto:hbe@interiorhealth.ca).

## Resolution

### Demonstrate commitment publicly

Local governments can pass a resolution to publicly establish a position and demonstrate a commitment to being breastfeeding-friendly.

The resolution can contain statements about the right to breastfeed in public, and the actions that will be taken in order to be breastfeeding-friendly. The resolution can then pave the way for policies, education, support for breastfeeding employees, and other measures.

**Example:** [St. John's resolution to promote a breastfeeding-friendly community](#)

As part of its membership with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador Council – a regional organization that represents the interests of incorporated municipalities across

the province – unanimously approved a resolution to work with health sector partners and Baby-Friendly Council of Newfoundland and Labrador to encourage breastfeeding-friendly communities.

**Example:** [Model resolution from Quebec](#)

The Association pour la santé publique du Québec (a non-profit organization that advocates for preventative health) and the Mouvement allaitement du Québec (a community organization that helps make environments conducive to breastfeeding) have created a model resolution that can be adapted by local governments. The template resolution is presented on the following page.

## Model Resolution

### **MAKING MUNICIPALITIES MORE BREASTFEEDING FRIENDLY**

WHEREAS (name of municipality) subscribes to an approach focused on the quality of life and well-being of families, health and sustainable development;

WHEREAS (name of municipality) is actively committed to promoting the health, quality of life and well-being of its citizens;

WHEREAS health professionals, like Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society, Dietitians of Canada and the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada, recommend exclusive breastfeeding until six months of age and continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods up to two years of age and beyond;

WHEREAS offering breastfeeding-friendly living environments contributes to the optimal development of young children and to the well-being of women, families and society;

WHEREAS breastfeeding in public is a right protected under the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Supreme Court has already ruled in favour of this practice in public places;

WHEREAS mothers are still asked all too often not to breastfeed in public places;

It is moved by \_\_\_\_\_, seconded by \_\_\_\_\_ and unanimously resolved (or resolved by majority vote) that: (Name of municipality) undertakes to:

1. Take a series of measures to facilitate, welcome and protect the act of breastfeeding in municipal public places;
2. Clearly identify municipal public places as environments where women are free to breastfeed without the obligation of covering up;
3. Set up breastfeeding rooms in public buildings for women who need a place that is comfortable and affords privacy;
4. Implement a pro-breastfeeding policy in all its public places and make it known to managers, employees and the population (or add measures to an existing policy);
5. Adopt a policy to support nursing employees and make it known to all managers and employees.

**\* Taking it further:**

6. Support the implementation of a network of places offering breastfeeding facilities with no purchase obligation;
7. Encourage restaurant and store operators on its territory to promote breastfeeding in their establishments;
8. Participate in and support the organization of events that promote breastfeeding in public;
9. Promote and support family-centred volunteer-based community organizations.

Source: Association pour la santé publique du Québec

Note: The public right of breastfeeding noted above is also protected under the BC Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.



# Stand-Alone Policy

## Set high-level direction

Similar to passing a resolution, a policy can be adopted by local governments to broadly support breastfeeding in public spaces and specifically on government premises. These policies provide direction to all government staff to consistently support public breastfeeding – as well as breastfeeding by employees.

These policies can be embedded in existing policy documents such as Official Community Plans, Healthy Community Strategies, and Social Development Plans.

### **Example:** [City of Penticton's Baby Friendly Policy](#)

Adopted in 2016, the City of Penticton's policy reinforces the right of children to be breastfed anywhere, and articulates how it is discriminatory to ask a breastfeeding parent to cover up or breastfeed somewhere else.

The policy requires that City staff:

- present a welcoming attitude to all women, including those who are breastfeeding;
- not ask breastfeeding women to cover up or relocate;
- respond appropriately to concerns from other visitors in City facilities by indicating

that breastfeeding is an acceptable and supported practice in City facilities, and that requesting a mother to cover up or relocate is in violation of the Human Rights Code of BC;

- offer any available public seating area in the facility for breastfeeding should a mother request an area to breastfeed;
- display a Baby Friendly symbol in City facilities; and
- be aware and educated on the rights of breastfeeding mothers.

### **Example:** [City of Whitehorse's Breastfeeding in City Premises Policy](#)

Adopted in 2019, the City of Whitehorse's policy covers many of the areas noted in the City of Penticton's policy, as well as requiring that employees:

- make reasonable efforts to provide individuals with a comfortable, private space to breastfeed, if requested; and
- provide a supportive environment for breastfeeding employees returning to work.

### **Example:** [Hamilton's Policy Template](#)

A breastfeeding policy template can be found on the following page.

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Municipalities can create an environment that supports breastfeeding families by making the municipality a 'breastfeeding-friendly community' by removing barriers around breastfeeding in public spaces where families feel welcome to breastfeed any time, anywhere.

– St. John's Deputy Mayor Sheilagh O'Leary

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## BREASTFEEDING FRIENDLY POLICY

Policy No. \_\_\_\_\_

Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ supports breastfeeding parents and the right to breastfeed undisturbed in public places.

### Purpose

To support visiting breastfeeding parents to breastfeed within \_\_\_\_\_ and to provide the conditions (time, space and support) necessary to facilitate breastfeeding.

### Definitions

*Breastfeeding*- includes pumping or expressing milk, as well as nursing directly from the breast.

*Public*- any visitor to \_\_\_\_\_ .

*Public place*- refers to any area in the premise where customers, clients, visitors are permitted.

### Application

\_\_\_\_\_ promotes and supports breastfeeding and the expression of breastmilk by members of the public when they are visitors to our premise.

Upon request, staff will provide assistance to visitors who wish to breastfeed their child by providing a location comfortable to both child and parent, where space is available.

Pursuant to the Ontario Human Rights Code, staff will not disturb breastfeeding parents, ask them to "cover up," or move to another area that is more "discreet."

If a member of staff feels they need more guidance on this they should speak to \_\_\_\_\_ .

Source: City of Hamilton

# Plans

## Create breastfeeding-friendly policies and guidelines

The design attributes of public spaces that support and encourage breastfeeding were presented in Part 3 of this toolkit, and can be integrated into local government plans, strategies, and guidelines. Although local governments may choose to create stand-alone Breastfeeding-Friendly Plans, it is likely more efficient and pragmatic to incorporate breastfeeding considerations in existing guidelines and plans.

### Development Permit Area Guidelines

Local governments can create guidelines on how proposed developments must address specific objectives, such as those related to breastfeeding. This is possible through their legislated authority to designate areas of land as development permit areas (DPAs).

Relevant deployment permit area types include: revitalization of areas in which commercial uses are permitted; and form and character of commercial, industrial, and multi-family residential development.

### Other Design Guidelines

Breastfeeding-friendly language can also be incorporated into existing guidelines, such as accessibility design guides, which aim to create spaces that are inclusive, safe, and consider the needs of everyone regardless of age and ability.

Through membership with their professional associations, design professionals working within local governments can also advocate for inclusion of breastfeeding-friendly measures in design standards, such as the Canadian Landscape Standard Guide for Construction Projects Across Canada.

### Official Community Plans

In addition to designation of DPAs in an Official Community Plan (OCP), an OCP can contain goal statements, objectives, and policies that support breastfeeding-friendly public spaces. OCP policy areas could include but are not limited to: parks and open space; transportation and streets; urban design; community services; social infrastructure; and food systems.

### Other Topic-Specific Plans, Area Plans, and Site Plans

Breastfeeding-friendly policies can also be incorporated into other municipal plans such as Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plans, Social Plans, Accessibility and Age-Friendly Plans, Transportation Plans, Food Systems Plans, Parks and Open Space Plans, Emergency Preparedness/Resilience Plans, and Healthy City Plans.

Likewise, breastfeeding policies can be adapted to different scales, such as area plans (e.g., Downtown Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, Waterfront Plans), site plans, streetscape plans, and facilities plans.

### **Example:** [City of Kamloops Food and Urban Agriculture Plan](#)

The City of Kamloops Food and Urban Agriculture Plan has a “breastfeeding-friendly community” action item that directs the City to “partner with Interior Health Authority and community agencies such as ‘Breastfeeding Matters in Kamloops’ to promote Kamloops as a breastfeeding-friendly community.” This measure recognizes that human milk is a vital food source and forms part of a community’s food system and food security.



# Community Engagement

## Meaningfully engage + learn from those with lived breastfeeding experience

It is important to find ways to make community engagement opportunities breastfeeding-friendly, to ensure events include as many voices and perspectives as possible. Mothers who breastfeed can benefit the engagement planning process because of their lived experience with breastfeeding in public and private spaces.

The [International Association of Public Participation](#) – an engagement framework used by a growing number of municipalities – asserts that engagement must recognize the needs and interests of all participants, and that input should be sought from participants on how they wish to participate in an engagement process.

## Inclusive Engagement for Breastfeeding Parents

Mothers of young children may have limited time. The best methods of engagement are simple, easy, and quick.

Strategies for making engagement safe, convenient, meaningful, and beneficial to breastfeeding mothers include:

- **Take the engagement events to where breastfeeding mothers conduct their lives** (e.g., facilities offering parent support services and programming, parks and grocery stores). In rural areas, engagement activities could be piggy-backed onto community events.
- **Create child-friendly spaces at engagement events** (e.g., play areas, readily accessible washrooms and change areas).
- **Provide childcare services**, supporting mothers to better participate.
- **Select event spaces/venues that are universally accessible** (e.g., for strollers and others with mobility limitations) and accessible by transit.
- **Offer an optional private space for breastfeeding** (e.g., a separate room or screened area).
- **Partner with community organizations** already working with breastfeeding parents to incorporate engagement into existing programming (e.g., libraries, parent support groups, childcare centres, and other service providers).
- **Host engagement online** so breastfeeding mothers can join from home (e.g., linking short surveys through social media, hosting virtual sessions with diverse date and time options). This is especially useful in rural/remote areas.
- **Provide compensation for lower income families.**
- **Collect data from front-line staff** in organizations that interact directly with pregnant and breastfeeding parents.
- **Account for the needs of breastfeeding mothers** based on intersecting identities related to gender, race, class, culture, language ability, body size, and physical ability. For more information click [here](#).

# Signage

## Explicitly invite breastfeeding in public

Similar to public art, visual cues like symbols and signs that explicitly invite breastfeeding remove any doubt that the activity is appropriate. These include posters, stickers, and other written materials with positive breastfeeding images and messages. They signal to both breastfeeding parents – as well as the general public – that breastfeeding is a normal, healthy, and welcomed public activity.

The international breastfeeding symbol (shown to the right in a Province of BC adaptation) is a useful and, in some cases, recognizable visual to include in signage.

It can be placed virtually anywhere: in civic facilities (as shown below); on transit; in public event and programming spaces; and in other public spaces. Local governments can also partner with or support local businesses and organizations to post signage on entrances, storefronts, and other high-visibility locations.



### **Example:** [The Little Milk Road, Outaouais, Quebec](#)

The Department of Public Health and partners initiated “La petite route de lait de l’Outaouais” (“The Little Milk Road”) in 2013 in an effort to make the social environment more welcoming to breastfeeding parents. Merchants participate by: displaying signage prominently on their front doors; having a comfortable seat available for breastfeeding parents; informing staff that the business/organization has joined The Little Milk Road and welcomes breastfeeding parents; and offering the possibility of breastfeeding without obligation or purchase.

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**Signage is very powerful because it stamps a value statement in a space right off the bat. If that sign is already there, the breastfeeding parents doesn't have to stand up for herself.**

-Tla'amin Nation / qathet Regional District / City of Powell River staff member

# Staff Support + Education

## Support breastfeeding employees + create advocates for public breastfeeding

### Staff Training for Interfacing with the Public

Growing awareness and educating personnel is an important part of supporting breastfeeding in public spaces.

In recent years there have been many Canadian examples of front-line staff – such as recreational program staff like lifeguards – who have requested that breastfeeding parents cover up or relocate while breastfeeding in public facilities.

This issue underscores the importance of educating staff about:

- a breastfeeding parent's right to breastfeed any time, anywhere;
- municipal policies, programs, and facilities that support breastfeeding;
- how to make the breastfeeding parent feel comfortable; and
- how to communicate with members of the public who complain about public breastfeeding.



Any guides or kits that are developed for staff can also be shared with other organizations, to advocate for breastfeeding-friendly public spaces and social norms more broadly.

**Example:** [Make Breastfeeding Your Business – Action Support Kit, Nova Scotia](#)

Created by in collaboration between Dalhousie University and Lunenburg and Queens Baby-Friendly Initiative Committee (Nova Scotia), this kit is intended to help businesses, organizations, and governments to:

- build their knowledge about breastfeeding; and
- provide tools that support breastfeeding parents, including both employees and clients.

### Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace

While most of the tools in this toolkit are outward-facing and primarily intended to support members of the public, local governments can also support breastfeeding in their role as an employer.

Local governments can support breastfeeding parents in their return to work, which in turn supports their reconnection to their field of practice as well as the healthy development of children. The ways in which the needs of breastfeeding parents can be accommodated include:<sup>3</sup>

- committing at the highest level of the organization's management to enable a breastfeeding-friendly environment;



- raising awareness through training and information on policies (e.g. staff orientation), including before staff take parental leaves;
- offering staff opportunities to resolve personal concerns about workplace breastfeeding;
- offering options such as flexible schedules, part-time work, or work from home;
- having a breastfeeding room with a refrigerator for pumped milk (or a flex space for smaller work places);
- posting breastfeeding-friendly signage; and
- normalizing lactation breaks.

**Example:** [Region of Waterloo's Toolkit for Employers](#)

The city of Waterloo's toolkit offers a range of tips and templates including:

- An assessment form to determine existing conditions related to human resources, policies, and programs;
- A list of accommodations for support of breastfeeding in the workplace, such as dedicated lactation breaks and spaces for breastfeeding and/or pumping;
- A sample workplace breastfeeding policy;
- A sample letter to employees who are preparing to return to work after parental leave, with information about workplace

support for breastfeeding, such as flexibility, privacy, and education;

- A lactation support feedback form for breastfeeding employees to evaluate the effectiveness of supports; and
- Sample paycheck messages indicating support for breastfeeding employees.

It also includes tips for managers and supervisors.



If you focus too much on the big tools like density bonusing and rezoning, then busy municipalities are never going to be able to put the staff resources into [creating breastfeeding-friendly public spaces]. I think it starts with training and education.

– City of New Westminster staff member

# Physical Assets

## Steward civic projects and assets for breastfeeding

### Capital Projects + Asset Management

Through its many assets such as streets and parks, a local government wields tremendous influence over the experience of breastfeeding parents within public spaces.

Breastfeeding-friendly measures include:

- Incorporation of design elements outlined in Part 3 into the planning and design of:
  - » Civic facilities such as libraries, pools, and recreation and community centres;
  - » Public realm amenities such as seating, public washrooms, landscaping, weather protection features, and other pedestrian facilities; and
  - » Transit stop amenities, including seating and weather protection.
- Advocating to transit service providers to incorporate measures outlined in Part 3.
- Inclusion of breastfeeding-friendly specifications in guides for new projects and upgrades to existing assets.
- Inclusion of a breastfeeding-friendly objective in project charters for capital works projects.

### **Example:** [The City of Edmonton's Complete Streets Design and Construction Standards](#)

The City of Edmonton aims to “create a network of streets that are safe, welcoming, attractive, comfortable, and functional for all users in all seasons.”

### Pilot + Demonstration Projects

Local governments can undertake pilot projects to test-fit designs and explore local applications of breastfeeding-friendliness. Examples include dedicated breastfeeding spaces, ranging from outdoor seating areas to indoor breastfeeding rooms. Based on lessons learned, strategies can be more widely deployed.

Demonstration projects that are undertaken by local governments can also inspire uptake by partners such as developers, businesses, and other organizations.



# Public Education Campaigns

## Offer resources + set a welcoming tone

### Local Government Websites

Local governments' websites provide essential information about municipal policies and programs, as well as a portal to important resources.

For local governments that have adopted a breastfeeding-friendly resolution or policy – or have other breastfeeding measures in place – their websites are suitable locations to promote them.

**Example:** [City of Hamilton's Breastfeeding Services and Supports webpage](#)

The City of Hamilton has a webpage dedicated to breastfeeding links including "Becoming a Breastfeeding-Friendly Place", a step-by-step guide for businesses and organizations that speaks to the importance of breastfeeding, outlines FAQs, and offers a checklist for action.

**Example:** [City of Toronto's Breastfeeding webpage](#)

Similar to the City of Hamilton, the City of Toronto has a webpage dedicated to breastfeeding services including an explicit statement that "all mothers have the right to breastfeed their babies in public anywhere, anytime", with further information about the Ontario Human Rights Commission's policy on breastfeeding in public.

It also articulates the City's "baby-friendly promise", which includes statements such as:

- We have a policy that protects, promotes, and supports breastfeeding. Our staff are trained to follow this policy.
- We work with our community partners to support breastfeeding in the City of Toronto.

- We welcome parents to breastfeed anytime, anywhere on City of Toronto property and other locations where we provide service.

### Social Media + Campaigns

Similarly, local governments can provide information and resources through their social media channels. These outreach efforts can range from providing information (similar to websites), to promoting events such as World Breastfeeding Week.

Social media campaigns and other campaigns that show imagery/videos/testimonials of breastfeeding parents provide another means to normalize breastfeeding in public and give a platform to the experiences of breastfeeding parents.



**Example:** [Her Voice. Her Story. – Toronto Public Health's Video Series](#)

Toronto Public Health launched a campaign to encourage residents to be more supportive of public breastfeeding. The campaign featured YouTube videos including testimonials from mothers about why breastfeeding in public is important to them.



# Public Art + Exhibitions

## Normalize breastfeeding through imagery

Visual imagery of breastfeeding contributes to its normalization, and counters the commercial sexualization of breasts<sup>4</sup>.

Municipal facilities like libraries, community centres, and even City Hall are often home to public exhibitions. Likewise, public art in outdoor public spaces – ranging from murals to temporary pop-up exhibits – are frequently commissioned and/or supported by local governments. Community Amenity Contributions and other municipal policies also can require or encourage public art.

Public art can be seen as playful, provocative, and/or beautiful, all the while being a powerful tool in breaking down stigma and celebrating public breastfeeding.

**Example:** [Breastfeeding Art Expo “Influencing Change Through Art”, KCR Community Resources and Interior Health](#)  
[www.breastfeedingchange.ca](http://www.breastfeedingchange.ca)

In 2017 to 2018, a travelling art expo showcased paintings, sculptures, and multimedia art pieces that celebrated and raised awareness about breastfeeding. It was designed to help mothers embrace breastfeeding, including in public.



**Example:** [Cardboard Cut-Outs of Breastfeeding Mothers in Kamloops, BC](#)

In an effort to spark conversation and normalize public breastfeeding, Breastfeeding Matters in Kamloops placed life-size cardboard cut-outs of photos of breastfeeding mothers around Kamloops (see photo below).



# Public Space + Public Life Studies

## Understand + evaluate existing conditions

Who are we planning for? What are their needs for activities in public spaces? Are those needs being met?

These are the questions that Public Space + Public Life (PSPL) studies seek to answer. PSPL studies are methodological tools to study public life through the collection of empirical evidence by surveyors. They examine how humans behave in public spaces by studying how people interact with their surroundings, and how the built environment supports their movements and activities.

**PSPL studies can assess whether breastfeeding activity is present and – if so – the characteristics of the public spaces in which parents are breastfeeding.**

Likewise, if breastfeeding is not present, PSPL studies may help reveal the characteristics of local public spaces that may not be conducive to breastfeeding, or may set the stage for further analysis and public engagement.

This establishes a strong baseline of existing conditions to support future planning and design efforts.

Also, comparing user-group profiles (e.g. number of breastfeeding parents/babies) before and after a design intervention or public realm initiative is an effective way of measuring its success.

**Example:** [City of Toronto's Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan – Public Space Public Life Study, 2018](#)

How do we expand what a public life study is? Are people breastfeeding in that space? Does it signal a level of comfort and safety? Who is missing?

-City of Toronto staff member



**Breastfeeding is an important part of community well-being. Local governments can positively influence breastfeeding rates by creating spaces where parents feel safe to breastfeed in public. The IH Healthy Community Development team can support implementation of this toolkit. Contact a team member by emailing [hbe@interiorhealth.ca](mailto:hbe@interiorhealth.ca).**

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