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**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TO INFORM STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING BREASTFEEDING EDUCATION IN MANITOBA SCHOOLS: RESULTS FROM PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS**

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**Background:**

Breastfeeding has numerous benefits for maternal and child health, yet over 75% of Canadian infants do not achieve the international recommendation of 6 months exclusive breastfeeding. Most breastfeeding information is targeted to pregnant women and new mothers, with few resources directed to society at large. Educating school children could help normalize breastfeeding by fostering the perception that breastfeeding is a normal way to feed infants.

**Objective:**

This ongoing project aims to integrate breastfeeding education into the Manitoba school curriculum.

**Methods:**

A series of focus groups and online surveys were conducted separately with school educators (SEs) and health care providers (HCPs) to explore needs, perceptions and anticipated barriers related to school-based breastfeeding education. 4 SEs and 8 HCPs participated in separate focus groups, and 41 SEs and 67 online surveys were completed.

**Results:**

The vast majority of respondents reacted positively to the idea of teaching students about breastfeeding in order to normalize the practice and prepare students as future parents. Perceived barriers included lack of teaching resources, cultural and religious differences, parental concerns, and concerns that students who were not breastfed may feel stigmatized. Only a small minority of respondents opposed the idea of breastfeeding education, as a low priority compared to mental health, life skills, and nutrition skills. Respondents recommended integrating breastfeeding education into existing subjects, including Family Studies, Physical Health Education, and Foods & Nutrition, and also identified additional stakeholder groups (eg. Roots of Empathy, Nutön) to further engage with to provide input on this project.

**Conclusion:**

Engaging with SEs and HCPs has provided critical information on strategies to weave breastfeeding education in the Manitoba school curriculum. Ultimately, this initiative will encourage societal support for breastfeeding, improve breastfeeding rates and enhance maternal-child health in Manitoba.