

Promoting a worker's right to breastfeed: Unique collaborations between labor unions and a state breastfeeding coalition

Presented by:

Sarah L. Grosshuesch MPH candidate
Department of Health Sciences
University of Alaska Anchorage



Alaska Breastfeeding Facts

- ★ Alaska is in the top three states for breastfeeding initiation rates in the nation.
- ★ 91% of Alaska women who delivered a live-born infant in 2005* initiated breastfeeding.

**Most recent PRAMS data*

Perham-Hester et al. Presented at Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition Breastfeeding and Beyond Conference 2007

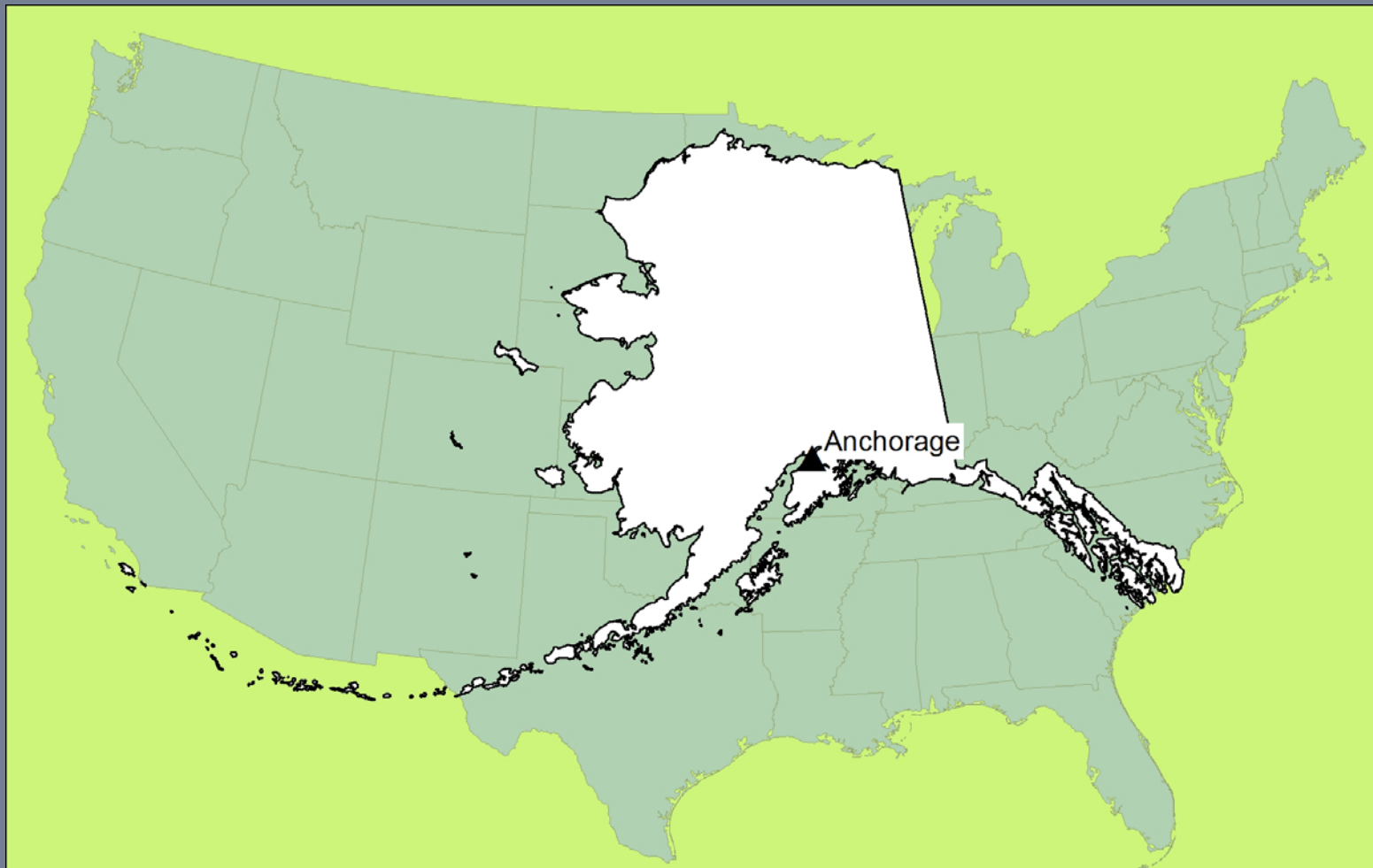
Unique Alaska

- ★ Alaska population: 670,053
- ★ Anchorage population: 270,951 (40%)
- ★ Union membership 22.8% (3rd in U.S. 2005)
- ★ Legislators representing Anchorage
 - 8/20 Senators
 - 16/40 Representatives

Source U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts.

Source U.S. Department of Labor

Alaska



Engaging Labor: an example

- ★ Anchorage Education Association (AEA) represents 3500 Anchorage School District teachers
- ★ Member of the NEA-Alaska Health Trust
- ★ 60% had been teaching in the district for 5 years or less – young teachers
- ★ Health care costs and wages were primary bargaining issues during 2004-2006 contract negotiations

Engaging Labor: an example

- ★ Members engaged health trust board
- ★ \$300.00 breast pump benefit passed unanimously
- ★ Provided the benefit to 13,000 state-wide members and their families
- ★ Established a standing committee to develop a school district lactation policy



The Next Step: breastfeeding and work in Alaska

- ★ 42% of mothers of newborns indicated they were currently in school or working outside the home*
- ★ Fewer working mothers indicated they were still breastfeeding (55.5%) than non-working mothers (69.3%)

* *When infants are 4 months old on average*

Data source: Alaska PRAMS, 2000-03

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The Next Step: breastfeeding and work in Alaska

Why Alaska women stop nursing

1. Baby had difficulty nursing (41.3%)
2. Baby not satisfied with only breast milk (38.7%)
3. Mom not producing enough milk (37.6%)
4. Mom's nipples were sore, cracked, or bleeding (23.8%)
5. Mom went back to work or school (23.1%)

Data source: Alaska PRAMS, 2004-05



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The Next Step: Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition

- ★ Working with the Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition (ABC) to promote worksite legislation
- ★ Legislation identified as a goal in ABC strategic plan
- ★ ABC board member assigned to advance policy and legislation for the ABC



The Next Step: legislation to protect the breastfeeding worker

- ★ ABC engaged legislators during 2006 elections
- ★ Bills introduced in the House and Senate
- ★ Used language from laws in other states
 - Requires “*reasonable unpaid break time must occur at times 08 during the workday that reasonably ensure the health and comfort of the mother and 09 the child and allow the employee to maintain breast milk supply.*” and “*an employer shall provide a private, secure, and sanitary room or other 12 location in close proximity to the work area, other than a toilet stall, where the 13 employee can express milk or breastfeed the child.*”

Source SB 113 and HB 190 “An Act relating to break times for employees who nurse a child” 2007

The Next Step: union endorsement

- ★ NEA-Alaska endorsed to promote health trust goals
- ★ Additional union endorsements follow
 - Anchorage Central Labor Council
 - ASEA/AFSCME Local 52
 - Alaska AFL-CIO
- ★ Additional endorsements
 - Anchorage Health and Human Services Commission
 - Alaska Health Education Consortium
 - Alaska Public Health Association

What do unions have to offer?

- ★ Represent their members' interests
- ★ Dedicated staff
- ★ Broad based political power
- ★ Political access
- ★ Money
- ★ Lobbyists

What do unions have to gain?

- ★ Lower health care costs
- ★ Improved working conditions
- ★ Allegiance of female workers and members with families
- ★ Cooperation with employers
- ★ Good press

The toolbox

- ★ Characteristics of likely union partners
 - Professional with large female membership
 - Working to control healthcare costs
 - High member participation
 - Political influence
 - Large
- ★ Engage active union members
- ★ Create experts within the membership
- ★ Provide research demonstrating the monetary benefit of breastfeeding
- ★ Frame it as a family rights issue

Reproducibility: state health departments

- ★ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends lactation support programs as part of the Healthier Worksite Initiative
- ★ State Health Departments should set the standard for other worksites
- ★ Most Health Departments are organized
- ★ Union sponsorship can promote organizational change
- ★ Union support may be required for changes to any working conditions

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