

THE ECONOMIC COST OF NOT BREASTFEEDING ON HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH SYSTEMS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Breastfeeding is one of the best buys in global health to improve social, health, and economic development outcomes.

Every US\$1 invested in breastfeeding in low-and middle-income countries can generate as much as US\$35 in economic returns. Only 34 percent of babies in the Philippines are exclusively breastfed for six months—below the global target of 50 percent. Not practicing World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF breastfeeding recommendations amounts to real costs in human life, quality of life, and national economic outcomes.

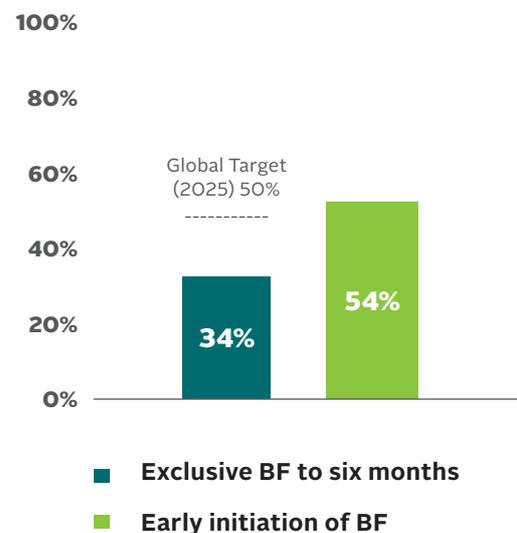
Research completed by Alive & Thrive and published by *Health Policy and Planning Journal* in June 2019 has quantified the economic toll that inadequate breastfeeding takes on individuals, communities, and countries. The analytical methods used in the Cost of Not Breastfeeding Tool are drawn from previously published studies on the economic consequences of malnutrition, cost of not breastfeeding, the Lancet Series on Breastfeeding, and the Investment Framework for Nutrition. It uses open access data to provide background on the impacts of not breastfeeding including lost life, lost productivity, and increased costs to families and health systems.

Key findings in the Philippines

Each year, optimal breastfeeding practices have the potential to:

- Prevent **8,924 child deaths**, an important contribution to reducing overall under-five child mortality
- Prevent **1,913 maternal deaths** from cancers and type II diabetes
- Save over **US\$16 million in health system treatment costs** related to inadequate breastfeeding
- Generate an additional **US\$3.8 billion** for the economy, or about **1.05% of the Philippines' GNI**, by increasing children's cognitive capacity and preventing premature mortality in the early years
- Reduce families' out of pocket expenditures to treat diarrhea and pneumonia

Breastfeeding prevalence in the Philippines



Source: 2008 Demographic Health Survey

What are the costs of not breastfeeding?



Increased vulnerability to disease results in more maternal and child mortality

When children are not breastfed (exclusively for the first six months and continuously up to two years), they are more susceptible to diarrhea and pneumonia—the two leading causes of childhood death worldwide. By supporting mothers to practice recommended breastfeeding practices, nearly 50 percent of under-two child deaths caused by diarrhea and pneumonia could be prevented annually. In the Philippines, improved breastfeeding practices could **save 8,924 children's lives** each year and **prevent 1,913 maternal deaths** from cancers and type II diabetes each year.



Health care costs to treat children and mothers

In the Philippines, inadequate breastfeeding causes nearly **3 million avoidable cases** of childhood diarrhea and pneumonia, nearly **21,000 cases** of type II diabetes in women and about **17,000 cases** of childhood obesity each year. The current cost to the health care system of the treatment of children with diarrhea and pneumonia that visit a health facility due to inadequate breastfeeding is estimated to be over **US\$16.3 million per year**.

This cost could rise dramatically as the health system coverage of treatment for diarrhea and pneumonia increases but could also be reduced with increased breastfeeding practices.



Cognitive losses result in lost wages for individuals

Inadequate breastfeeding impacts a child's ability to learn and consequently hinders their future earning potential. The Philippines stands to lose more than **US\$2.3 billion a year** due to future cognitive losses associated with inadequate breastfeeding.



Indirect costs to treat diseases result in significant costs for families

When children become ill due to diarrhea and pneumonia caused by inadequate breastfeeding, parents often and caregivers often incur additional costs to take them to seek treatment at a health care facility. Based on estimates from other countries, the economic losses that result from lost productivity and transportation costs could amount to **25 percent of the cost of the health care treatment** itself.



Formula costs are significant and reduce a family's disposable income

Economic growth and increasing disposable incomes have attracted companies to market their breastmilk substitute products to mothers, influencing their feeding choices. The cost to purchase economy brand infant formula can be significant for families compared to breastmilk, which is free, safe, and hygienic for all babies.

Policymakers must invest in national policies and programs to support breastfeeding

In 2012, the 194 countries of the World Health Assembly (WHA) committed to a target of increasing the global prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life to at least 50 percent by 2025. To reach this target and realize the essential health and economic benefits of breastfeeding, the Philippines government must invest to scale up breastfeeding at a national level. Policymakers should move quickly to adopt, strengthen, and implement the following policies and programs to support mothers to optimally breastfeed:

- **Policies and Practices in Health Facilities:** Include nutrition counseling and the *10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding* in hospital standards and accreditation systems.
- **Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes:** Monitor and enforce the Philippines Milk Code (Executive Order 51), strengthen it based on the recommendations of WHA 69.9, and ensure that it is not weakened.
- **Paid Leave and Workplace Policies:** Expand paid family leave and workplace breastfeeding policies equitably, covering all workers in the formal and informal sectors, and allocate public funding.
- **Social and Behavior Change Communication:** Guided by robust data and formative research, design strategies using multiple communication channels tailored to the local context, including community networks and community-based workers.
- **Integration in Universal Health Care:** Ensure breastfeeding support in all settings is included in the package of services supported by Universal Health Care.

The evidence is clear: investing in policies and programs that support mothers to breastfeed saves lives and provides a high return on investment.

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