



Innovative Oregon Health Plan Collaborative Donates \$166,000 to Northwest Mothers Milk Bank

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Portland, Ore.

In continuing efforts to improve health by convening stakeholders and promoting sound public health policy, Oregon Public Health Institute (OPHI) has hit upon a winning new approach: convening an insurance collaborative to make sound investments in prevention.

“The idea is simple,” says Mary Lou Hennrich, Executive Director of OPHI, who innovated the idea. “People change plans frequently, making it difficult for health plans to see an economic return from their investment in prevention and health promotion.... But if the plans *all* choose an activity, policy or investment *together*, the entire community benefits, and the whole system saves money, regardless of where people purchase their insurance.”

Known as OHIPP (Oregon Health Insurers Partnering for Prevention), contributing plans include CareOregon, Family Care, Kaiser Permanente, PacificSource Health Plans, Providence Health Plans, ODS and Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield. They have worked together for two years to choose a health topic and evidence-based intervention with the greatest potential to improve health and save health care dollars: breastfeeding promotion.

For starters, the group recently donated \$166,000 to Northwest Mothers Milk Bank, a nonprofit human milk bank organization that plans to soon be processing and distributing pasteurized human milk.

The OHIPP funds have fulfilled a significant portion of the milk bank’s capital investment campaign goals, to purchase processing equipment to pasteurize human milk from screened donors, and distribute it to area hospitals for use with medically fragile newborns.

OHIPP members chose NWMMB as recipients of their first investment, after pouring over data demonstrating the difference six months exclusive breastmilk consumption makes in the health outcomes of all babies and mothers, and particularly, the harmful impact of human milk substitutes on premature babies.

“All babies need mother’s milk, and only mother’s milk, for the first six months of life,” said Amelia Psmythe, Director of the Breastfeeding Coalition of Oregon. “Sometimes, particularly after

premature birth, there is a lag in milk production while a mother's body transitions from pregnancy to breastfeeding. In the interim, those fragile babies still need to eat. The introduction of artificial formula at that time greatly increases the likelihood of the infants developing necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), a disease of the intestines, which leads to substantial costs in neonatal intensive care, and significant suffering for the child throughout life."

"When we looked at the data, the choice was clear," explains OPHI board member and OHIPP founding member Jack Friedman, CEO of Providence Health Plans. "There were 44 cases of NEC in Oregon in 2010, amounting to over \$15 million dollars in hospital charges, with an average charge per case of \$357,571. Up to 85 percent of cases of NEC can be prevented with exclusive use of human milk in Neonatal ICUs. So, for less than the cost of treating one case of NEC, we could significantly help the Northwest Mothers Milk Bank get established, thereby increasing hospital access to banked donor milk, significantly reducing NEC among Oregon's premature infants for decades, and saving substantial health care dollars for everyone. This is the kind of win-win that brought OHIPP members together, and that will keep us working together in the future."

There are 11 nonprofit human milk banks in North America. The Pacific Northwest has some of the highest breastfeeding rates in the country, but to date, the nearest processing milk banks are in San Jose and Denver. In preparation for developing a local processing center, Northwest Mothers Milk Bank has established donor drop-off sites at 10 locations around Oregon and Washington. 40,000 ounces of milk from these drop-off sites has been shipped to San Jose and Denver for pasteurization and distribution. Meanwhile, hospitals in the Northwest are not able to have their banked milk orders consistently fulfilled. A processing milk bank is needed closer to Northwest breast milk donors, and the medically fragile babies in local hospitals that desperately need banked human milk.

The OHIPP collaborative is part of a larger community effort to bridge this gap. OHIPP members comprise 85 percent of the private market share and 45 percent of the public market share among Oregon insurers. "There is nothing else like this in the country," remarked Dr. Larry Grummer-Strawn, Chief Officer for the Nutrition branch of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "The OHIPP collaborative has developed an innovative solution to America's health care crisis that we hope becomes a model for other states."

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Oregon Public Health Institute (OPHI) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to improving the health of Oregonians through advocacy and support of effective public health policy and activities. **Oregon Health Insurers Partnering for Prevention** (OHIPP) is a collaboration of health insurers, coordinated by Oregon Public Health Institute (OPHI), dedicated to improving the health of those they insure by making sound investments in prevention. OHIPP members focus on preventing childhood obesity and improving child health by intervening with children at the earliest possible time: while their mothers are still pregnant.