Evaluation of a Practice Development Initiative to improve midwives’ breastfeeding knowledge and skills.

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Background and context  
The benefits of breastfeeding for infant, mother, family and community are well recognized, and increasing the rate and length of breastfeeding is considered an important health promotion strategy. Improving the knowledge and practice of practitioners is considered an important aspect of this strategy.

Aim  
The project aimed to evaluate a staff education and policy development program based on the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, implemented in a metropolitan health district in Queensland, Australia.

Methodology  
Staff were surveyed before and after the educational intervention. The survey focused on breastfeeding knowledge, skill, practice and confidence.

Analysis  
Descriptive statistics were used to analyse survey data.
Key Findings
A convenience sample of 101 midwives completed the survey prior to the commencement of the educational program (Group 1) and 87 completed the survey 12 months later (Group 2). There were no significant differences between the groups in terms of age, employment status or experience.

Practices and policies of interest were skin to skin contact, early feeding, positioning and attachment, and reduction in use of bottles and teats. Participants indicated increased knowledge of, and inclusion of these practices following the education. Seventy seven percent of Group 1 participants indicated that they frequently or always assisted mothers and babies to have skin to skin contact, compared to 95% of Group 2, with 81% of Group 1 indicating that they frequently or always assisted mothers with the first feed, compared with 94% in Group 2. When asked if mothers were advised to avoid using bottles and teats during the time that breastfeeding was being established, 39% of Group 1 participants indicated that they always advised mothers, compared to 63% of Group 2 participants.

Conclusion and implications
The change in policy and educational program influenced breastfeeding practice across a range of areas.