Title: PINSTEP: Academic-Community Partnership to Improve Vulnerable Women’s Access to Skilled Lactation Support through the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program

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Background: Skilled lactation support is an important public health intervention, but is often less accessible to socially/economically vulnerable families. Integrating lactation support within community perinatal services is one strategy to address this. The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP), a federal initiative implemented through community agencies, aims to improve breastfeeding but lacks formal frameworks for lactation support.

Objective: To investigate opportunities to increase vulnerable women’s access to skilled lactation support through the CPNP.

Methods: PINSTEP is an academic-community partnership applying multiple research methods across sequential phases. Research priorities are determined collaboratively, with lead researchers embedded within participating CPNP sites’ programmes. Phase one included prospective cohort and qualitative studies to examine an existing charitably-funded lactation support program at one CPNP site, providing free in-home lactation consultant services and double-electric breast pumps. Phase two aimed to test the effects of delivering similar services in two additional sites, but was suspended prematurely due to COVID-19. A third phase is under development and will include redesign of the intervention study, adapted for post-pandemic CPNP programming and research learnings to date. A survey of multiple CPNP sites across Canada is also planned to identify other promising lactation support models for testing in future studies.

Results: Recruitment/retention were high in phase one and two studies, conducted at CPNP sites primarily serving low-income newcomers. Findings demonstrated high uptake of lactation services and unexpectedly high levels of breastfeeding. Qualitative findings showed key intervention elements to be provision of in-home support by skilled and non-judgmental providers.

Conclusions: The PINSTEP academic-community partnership is built on trusting relationships and strong CPNP engagement by researchers. An evolving research programme is producing evidence on lactation support interventions relevant to participating sites, the larger CPNP, and other community perinatal programmes.

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