

Insights

National Action Teams Promote Safe Sleep and Breastfeeding Across the Country

Find out how to get involved

Improving infant safe sleep and breastfeeding requires a national commitment from individuals across systems and sectors: public health, hospitals, daycare and early education, home visiting, and advocacy organizations, to name just a few. By bringing together cross-sector partners focused on the common goal of supporting safe sleep and breastfeeding, initiatives can develop comprehensive strategies—strategies that address the many different reasons sleep-related infant deaths persist.

Facts About Sleep-Related Infant Deaths

- Approximately [3,600 infants](#) die from sleep-related causes every year
- Sleep-related infant deaths disproportionately affect Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and low-income [families](#)
- Any breastfeeding, compared to no breastfeeding at all, can [protect against death](#) from SIDS

In 2016, a National Coalition of more than 70 cross-sector, national level organizations came together to develop a [National Action Plan](#) for promoting safe sleep and breastfeeding. Since then, four National Action Teams have worked together to help implement the plan. The teams are focused on driving measurable change in four priority areas:

- **Aligning National, State and Local Efforts**
- Promoting **Conversation Modules**
- Supporting **Early Child Care and Education**
- **Public Media and Media Relations**

The National Coalition and Action Teams are key partners on the NICHQ-led National Action Partnership to Promote Safe Sleep Improvement and Innovation Network (NAPPSS-IIN), funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau. These partnerships support the initiative's ambitious aim to make safe sleep and breastfeeding the norm in states and communities across the country.

"It's inspiring to see a diverse array of national leaders and community change agents come together around a common goal to help our nation's children," says NICHQ Senior Project

Director, Stacy Scott, PhD, MPA, who directs the national action teams' work. "Over the past decade, improvements in eliminating sleep-related infant deaths have stagnated, and I think that's been a real wakeup call that we need to seek innovative solutions. And we know those solutions aren't possible without diverse partners that bring together a range of professional and lived experiences."

The four National Action teams meet regularly to track progress, identify action items and plan next steps. Keep reading for an overview on each team and learn how you can get involved!

Aligning National, State and Local Efforts

Too often, health improvement efforts have addressed safe sleep and breastfeeding separately, which has made things confusing for families. Depending on who advises them, families will often hear different messages about what's best for keeping their baby safe and healthy. This is especially problematic because important best practices for breastfeeding, such as sleeping in the same room as your baby and holding your baby closely to your chest, are sometimes associated with unsafe sleep habits because parents may accidentally fall asleep with their baby in their bed. Helping parents understand how to promote breastfeeding and keep their babies safe requires a consensus among stakeholders on safe sleep and breastfeeding best practices.

This is where the Aligning National, State and Local Efforts Action Team comes into play. Their goal is to maintain a shared vision for success between the breastfeeding and safe sleep communities. Currently, the Action Team is developing an Organizational Self-Assessment tool. The tool can help organizations assess their knowledge and support of safe infant sleep and breastfeeding practices, so they can identify strengths and gaps in how they serve health care professionals, community partners and families.

Conversation Modules

Helping families practice safe sleep habits is about more than sharing guidelines; it's about talking to families, learning about their individual experiences and beliefs, and working with them to develop a plan that addresses their concerns and respects their perspectives. The Conversations Modules Action Team is working to spread a [series of learning modules](#) that can improve conversations between health care professionals and families.

Ultimately, they seek to reinforce the consistent use of the conversations modules across multiple care settings, so stakeholders who influence families' decisions can increase awareness of the importance of integrated breastfeeding and safe sleep behaviors, reinforce evidence-based policies and practices, and promote an empowering, problem-solving approach for families to adopt.

"The team is working to create customized learning opportunities for important sectors in the community to encourage adoption of the Conversations Approach across a broad spectrum of groups and individuals that support families before and after their babies are born," says Suzanne M. Bronheim, PhD, co-chair of the conversation modules action team.

Early Child Care and Education (ECE)

Every year, thousands of babies are cared for in an early child care and education center. Empowering their employees as champions for safe sleep can help all babies sleep safely, no matter who is caring for them. That's why the ECE Action Team's focus is ensuring that all childcare facilities understand and promote safe sleep, and have policies aligned with American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines.

Currently, the Action Team is working on updating a Frequently Asked Question Guide about safe sleep and breastfeeding that can be shared with childcare providers as well as parents and other caregivers. The guide includes an infographic with data and FAQs about safe sleep and breastfeeding, so that readers can quickly grasp key concepts.

Public Media and Media Relations

From celebrity Instagram posts to popular advertisements, today's public media is filled with images of babies sleeping in unsafe positions or using unsafe products. Seeing images that go against safe sleep guidelines can confuse things for families and caregivers, especially when shared by organizations or people they trust. The Public Media and Media Relations Action Team is working to remove these mixed messages by spreading a common message about safe sleep among key stakeholders, including infant product manufacturers, retailers and consumers. Their goal is to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of and promote images and products that abide by AAP recommendations for infant safe sleep.

Recently, the Action Team has launched a focused effort to contact diverse media representatives who can best reach communities of color, says Scott.

"We can't address safe sleep disparities unless we do more to make sure our messages reach Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native families," says Scott. "By reaching out to diverse media and asking them to share safe sleep messages, we can bring consistent, culturally competent messages to populations who have been historically overlooked."

Interested in becoming a member of NAPPSS-IIN's growing expertise base through the National Coalition? Email nappss@nichq.org with your interest to join. We welcome professional associations, and manufacturers that provide goods and services to infant caregivers, as well as many other types of national organizations.