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## **All of Europe supports Breastfeeding!**

The 'Blueprint for Action' to protect, promote and support breastfeeding across all European countries will be launched during the Irish Presidency of the EU by Mr. Micheál Martin, Irish Minister for Health and Children in Dublin Castle on Friday June 18<sup>th</sup> 2004.

Experts from 28 European countries were involved in drawing up the Blueprint and it is the first time that an all-European approach has been taken to address common breastfeeding issues.

The decision to develop the Blueprint was based on overwhelming public health evidence showing that protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding is one of the most effective and efficient interventions for improving lifelong health. Breastfeeding makes a major contribution to the present and future health of children and their mothers and it can also significantly reduce health costs for families and public health care systems.

The Blueprint is the outcome of an EU-funded project and its development was coordinated over an 18 month period by Dr. Adriano Cattaneo, Institute of Child Health "Burlo Garofolo", Trieste (Italy).

The experts brought together to draw up the Blueprint came from many areas of medicine, nutrition, public health, midwifery and nursing, lactation consulting and voluntary breastfeeding counsellor groups with responsibility for policy, planning, education and delivery of maternity and child health services in the 28 participating countries.

These experts have succeeded in developing an effective public health tool that can be adapted to fit different national and regional health structures and stages of policy development and service provision that apply across Europe.

This approach is in line with the European Commission Health and Consumer Protection Directorate's commitment to support local, regional and national initiatives aimed at increasing the up-take and duration of breastfeeding in Europe.

The up-take and duration rates of breastfeeding, as well as policies and practices to support breastfeeding, differ widely across Europe. This is borne out by a comparative analysis undertaken by the expert group of the current situation in all the 28 participating countries.

The Blueprint identifies a set of actions, supported by evidence of proven effectiveness, in the areas of policy, planning, communication, education, training, and delivery of health services at society, hospital, community and individual level.

It is the fervent hope of the project team that the Blueprint will be adopted, utilised and adequately resourced so as to achieve a Europe-wide improvement in the initiation, exclusivity and duration rates of breastfeeding in accordance with the WHO Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding.

The Project Team are convinced that the application of the Blueprint of Action will result in more parents who are confident, empowered and satisfied with their breastfeeding experience and many more health workers and policy makers with the expertise to effectively support, promote and protect breastfeeding.

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