

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## **New KZN Dept of Health/UKZN programme set to help reduce child mortality rates in KwaZulu-Natal**

The battle to reduce the rate of child mortality in KwaZulu-Natal has received a major boost with the launch today (05 August 2014) of the R32m KwaZulu-Natal Initiative for Breastfeeding Support (KIBS), which is a three year joint project between the KZN Department of Health and University of KwaZulu-Natal.

As many as 500 babies per year will be saved - if mothers across the province respond to the clarion call to breastfeed their children for as long as possible. This effort will be further enhanced by mothers donating their milk to human milk banks which are going to be established across the KZN Province, including at [King Edward VIII Hospital](#), [Port Shepstone Hospital](#), [Grey's Hospital](#), [Newcastle Hospital](#), [Dundee Hospital](#), [Benedictine Hospital](#) and [Stanger Hospital](#). Currently there are five such banks in the province.

The project, launched today and which coincides with National Breastfeeding Week, is aimed at improving exclusive breastfeeding rates in the province. It will increase access to human milk for sick and small neonates in KwaZulu-Natal by 2017. Funded by the KZN Department of Health, it is a joint effort involving the University of KZN and the Elma Foundation.

The DOH will create posts for 56 lactation advisors to support initiation of breastfeeding in all hospitals in KZN. The Department has already employed over 500 nutrition advisors based in every primary health care facility, and this project will mentor and up-skill these advisors by providing additional on-site support. This project will also develop the skills of 228 community health facilitators to support community caregivers to improve breastfeeding at household level.

The project also seeks to change mind-sets around breastfeeding, increase its social acceptability and create awareness about human milk banking within KZN communities. A number of publicity drives promoting exclusive breastfeeding will be held in communities to create an awareness of its importance and relevance. The fourth objective is to monitor and evaluate the effect of interventions to promote breastfeeding on infant feeding practices in KwaZulu-Natal.

Speaking at the launch at UKZN today, Dr Victoria Mubaiwa, the KZN Department of Health's manager for Maternal Child and Women Health, described the establishment of KIBS as a significant step in the reduction of the rate of child mortality.

"If we get breastfeeding right and make sure that 95% of women breastfeed for as long as possible, we could potentially save more than 500 babies each year. So this is a very significant step in reducing child mortality," she said.

Prof Anna Coutsoudis from the department of paediatrics at UKZN, said: "As more and more mothers start breastfeeding, we will have more donors. We have to get out there, let mothers know how wonderful Breastfeeding is, and that it is not only wonderful for their own baby, but it can save other babies too. Most people have never heard of donating breast milk, creating awareness is the only way we will change minds and lead people away from baby formula. We've had so many mixed messages in the past, but now we're excited because we are speaking one language."

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