



Baby-Friendly Initiative Ontario

Briefing Note

SUBJECT/ISSUE:

BFI Ontario members have been inquiring about Baby Box Canada and wanting to know what are the recommendations from a BFI and WHO Code perspective. There is also some confusion around “The Baby Box Co.” and Baby Box Canada.

BACKGROUND:

“The Baby Box Co.” is the international organization behind baby box programs that are being launched in several Canadian provinces this year. The program is modelled after a 75 year old Finnish program where expectant parents receive layettes (boxes) filled with basic baby supplies intended to ensure all babies get an equal start in life. The box provided by “The Baby Box Co.” is also being promoted as a safe sleep surface for infants. This program is different than Baby Box Canada.

Baby Box Canada is a non-profit organization that follows a similar model to the Finnish program. Baby Box Canada is also distributing boxes of free sample baby products to Ontario residents starting in August 2016, and registration is open to expectant parents now. The boxes provided are NOT approved as a safe sleep surface for infants.

Some of the products and partners/sponsors found on the Baby Box Canada website are violators of the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, and it appears as though Baby Box Canada is engaging in active marketing to expectant and new parents which also violates the Code.

There is a statement describing the Baby-Friendly Initiative at the bottom of the “Brand Partner’s and Sponsors” web page which is misleading to the general public and could be misinterpreted as BFI compliance.

COMMENTS:

This issue was brought forward to the Chair of the BFI Assessment Committee in Ontario and to the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada to ask for advice on how to respond. There was discussion around how Baby Box Canada appears to be engaging in active marketing to expectant and new parents and that some of the products and partners/sponsors found on their website are Code violators.

An advocacy letter is being sent on behalf of BFI Ontario to the Director of Operations and Strategic Planning for Baby Box Canada, outlining our concerns regarding the potential WHO Code violations as they relate to informed decision making. The letter advises that BFI Ontario does not endorse or

associate with any company or product. The letter requested that the statement on their website regarding BFI be removed as it is misleading. Baby Box Canada is encouraged to develop policies that are consistent with BFI, the WHO Code, and subsequent, relevant WHA resolutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

BFI designated organizations and organizations pursuing BFI designation should not promote or endorse any company or product such as Baby Box Canada.

Organizations should look at websites they suggest or recommend to clients thoroughly. Check the links for sponsors or distributors and think about what the effect might be on expectant and postpartum parents. Product loyalty by consumers is very well documented by research.

Organizations need to be vigilant when having direct dialogue with owners/leaders of companies/organizations to ensure the dialogue does not become leverage for their product. Any dialogue can be manipulated and portrayed as product or company endorsement.

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