

WHAT IS AN IBCLC?

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants have been working in the health care field for 29 years in the United States and around the world. The certification can be added to an existing health care profession, or function as a stand-alone certification.

The IBCLC works in hospital maternity and pediatric care units to provide clinical lactation services and lactation education to staff. In the outpatient setting, lactation consultants work independently, or in medical practices or public health settings. Lactation consultants can be employed by corporations to provide workplace lactation services or work for government or other health care agencies. Their expertise is used to develop and implement policies to support, protect, and promote breastfeeding. Some IBCLCs carry out breastfeeding-related research.

Depending on their educational and professional backgrounds, IBCLCs are trained in one of the 3 pathways:

Path 1	Path 2	Path 3
14 Health Science Courses	14 Health Science Courses	14 Health Science Courses
90 Hours of Lactation Specific Education	90 Hours of Lactation Specific Education	90 Hours of Lactation Specific Education from one of 5 academic programs in the U.S.
1000 Clinical Hours as a paid or volunteer Recognized Health Professional (physician, nurse, dietician) and/or Recognized Mother Support Counselor, WIC Peer Counselor or La Leche League Leader	500 Hours under Direct Supervision IBCLC who has recertified	300 Hours under Direct Supervision IBCLC who has recertified

Following this education and training, they must pass an exam from the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners which operates independent of any training entity. It is mandatory to repeat the exam every 10 years, and in the interval, to recertify at 5 years with 75 hours of lactation specific continuing education.

The IBCLC is the only certification recognized by the U.S. Surgeon General as defining the lactation consultant and the only one used as a quality metric by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Other education programs and certificate courses providing knowledge of basic lactation support for the normal course of breastfeeding exist. They offer certificates for 15 to 45 hour courses with no prerequisites and no required clinical experience.

The U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding states, "International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) are the only health care professionals certified in lactation care."

Additionally, the Surgeon General's Call to Action recommends in Action Step 11 the need to make IBCLC services available by policy changes. The Surgeon General has published implementation strategies for doctors, nurses, and health care leaders. These documents summarize Action Step 11 as follows:

- Guarantee equitable access to services provided by International Board Certified Lactation Consultants
- Include support for lactation as an essential medical service for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and children
- Ensure that reimbursement of IBCLCs is not dependent on their having other professional certification or licensure