

Partner profile: The Human Milk Banking Association of South Africa

Nonprofit organization coordinates, advises, and monitors milk banks to ensure adherence to high standards

As the number of milk banks in South Africa grew over the past decade, it became clear that there was a need for standards and guidelines to ensure the safety and quality of donor milk. To meet this need, the Human Milk Banking Association of South Africa (HMBASA) was established to support best practices and monitor the operation of milk banks. South Africa has not yet passed any legislation governing human milk banking.

HOW DID THE ASSOCIATION START?

Human milk banks once existed informally in hospitals throughout South Africa. Women with extra milk expressed milk to feed infants whose mothers could not breastfeed. That practice came to an abrupt end in the 1980s, however, when researchers discovered that HIV could be transmitted through breastmilk. Scientists later proved that pasteurization rendered milk safe, while preserving most of its immune properties, allowing milk banks to operate safely once again.

The first milk bank in South Africa was started in Durban in 2000 by Professor Anna Coutsooudis of the University of KwaZulu-Natal to care for infants who had been abandoned or orphaned because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Other milk banks soon followed. The banks' founders were concerned, however, that there were no regulations concerning the operation of milk banks in South Africa. With the number of milk banks growing, it was imperative to not only ensure safe milk supplies, but also to instill confidence in the system. Guidelines for donor milk banking were written by a team of local health care professionals, based on those developed in the United States and Great Britain. In 2009, HMBASA was registered with the government as a nonprofit organization.

WHAT DOES THE ASSOCIATION DO?

HMBASA coordinates a network of milk banks throughout the country, providing them with best-practice guidelines. These guidelines are based upon up-to-date research and clinical evidence for processing donor milk to ensure optimal infant health. The association has published standards of practice to enable monitoring and self-regulation of milk banks. Although milk banks operate and are funded independently of one another, HMBASA offers information and guidance to those seeking to set up new banks. The association also works to promote and support breastfeeding, including a public service campaign to encourage women to become milk donors.

HMBASA purpose

Mission statement

1. Coordinate a national network of centers that collect and process human milk and simultaneously protect, promote, and support breastfeeding.
2. Provide regularly updated guidelines and monitor standards of practice of milk banks.



Objectives

1. Provide information and advice in all areas of human milk banking, including best practices.
2. Develop, maintain, and update guidelines in accordance with new research and clinical evidence.
3. Assist with setting up new banks (each bank to provide its own funding and committee and operate autonomously).
4. Maintain a database of all banks.
5. Raise funds to pay the salary for a national coordinator and other running expenses.
6. Organize annual visits to each bank to evaluate practices and provide feedback.
7. Promote, protect, and support breastfeeding.



Chester Milk Bank United Kingdom

How can people learn more?

For more information, please contact HMBASA through the postal or email addresses listed below, or check the organization's website (www.hmbasa.org/za).

HMBASA
P.O. Box 70380
Overport
Durban
4067

Email: info@hmbasa.org.za

WHO SERVES ON THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE?

HMBASA's management committee consists of 12 health professionals who are actively involved in promoting breastfeeding and human milk banking in South Africa. Those currently serving include lactation consultants, neonatologists, a public health scientist, an immunologist, and a midwife.

HMBASA holds committee meetings twice each year and convenes its annual general meeting for members during the Conference on Priorities in Perinatal Care in Southern Africa, held each March. (See www.perinatalpriorities.co.za for a schedule.)

WHO CAN JOIN?

Membership is open to staff of human milk banks and any health care workers with an interest in infant health and nutrition. There is currently no annual fee, but there is a one-time payment of ZAR100. Registration can be completed through HMBASA's website.

HOW CAN HUMAN MILK BANKING BE SUPPORTED?

HMBASA needs the support of government, as well as civil society, through leadership, membership, legislation, and resources to enable the association to standardize human milk banking in South Africa. The establishment and regulation of human milk banks fits in perfectly with the government's efforts to promote breastfeeding for optimal infant and young child feeding. National and local government participation in HMBASA is vital to make the organization effective, and to ensure that vulnerable infants in South Africa have access to donor milk that is safe and nutritious.



King Edwards Hospital Fuch's Milk Bank

TO LEARN MORE

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or The Human Milk Banking
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PATH is an international nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, PATH helps provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act. PATH's work improves global health and well-being.

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