Rockland County recently launched a new program to make sure that all babies have access to a simple and low-cost form of nutrition that can provide lifelong benefits: breastfeeding.

Women in Rockland County lead the state in initiating breastfeeding but there are pockets of disparity where this beneficial practice either isn’t used or is stopped too soon.

To tackle this disparity, the county devised an innovative and collaborative approach to bring new mothers — especially low income mothers — the tools and support they need to start and continue nurturing their children in the most healthful way.

The Rockland County Department of Health, under the direction of Commissioner Dr. Patricia Schnabel Ruppert, was awarded a competitive $1.2 million state grant to encourage breastfeeding. Rockland County was one of only six orations in New York State awarded this opportunity, which will pay dividends in giving children a healthy start in life.

It’s an especially important consideration in Rockland County, where one in three residents receives Medicaid benefits. Medicaid costs comprise 55 percent of our county’s property tax levy.

The breastfeeding program aims to increase both the number of new moms who are breastfeeding and encourage them to continue longer in order to provide maximum benefit to their children.

The start of the breastfeeding program comes during another innovative program we have begun in Rockland County: the Women’s Initiative, a year-long effort to further the success of women in the community and workplace.

Rockland County is committed to making sure that all women who live and work here have access to educational and economic opportunities that will enable them to be successful.

The ability to continue to nurse their babies once they return to the workplace is part of that goal. As part of our effort to encourage breastfeeding, the county has promised to increase the number of lactation rooms available to its employees.

The Rockland County Department of Health employs a full-time international certified lactation consultant who is available to help both businesses and individuals.

According to the New York State 2015 Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System annual report, nearly 95 percent of babies born in the county are breastfed at least once — more than in any other county.

A full 47 percent of newborns are breastfed exclusively in the hospital — above the state average and close to the state’s Prevention Agenda goal of 48 percent.

Yet breastfeeding did not continue for as long as recommended. Statewide, the percentage of infants fed any breast milk increased from 7.5 percent in 2008 to 8.5 percent in 2013.

There has been no improvement in New York in the overall percentage of infants exclusively fed breast milk during the birth hospitalization, which remains at 41 percent.

New York has the highest rate in the nation of formula supplementation of breastfed infants before the second day of life. This action affects exclusive breastfeeding and duration of breastfeeding.

Low prevalence of breastfeeding contributes to higher rates of infectious disease during infancy, increased risk of necrotizing
A prototype was created inside a center serving clients in the Women, Infants and Children program in the village of Spring Valley.

Rockland has five WIC centers serving a total of 12,500 participants.

In keeping with Rockland County’s goal of providing the maximum service at the minimum cost to taxpayers, the prototype was furnished with surplus equipment from a now-closed county-owned nursing home. This surplus equipment included comfortable chairs where a mom can recline, tables and a couch.

Rockland County is working with its community partners to decide where to locate the remaining Baby Cafes. Some options include churches, federally qualified health centers or medical offices that serve the two targeted towns.

Services will also be available for women who do not meet income eligibility guidelines but want help with breastfeeding.

This grant will enable us to work with our community partners to make both practical and policy changes that makes it easier for women to breastfeed to give babies the healthiest start possible.

By working together with our community partners and bringing support and tools directly to women who need them, we hope to encourage more women to breastfeed for a longer period of time.

This initiative is good for babies, good for moms, good for families, good for businesses, and good for Rockland County.

The world of government entities is like no other. It has its own processes. Its own requirements. Even its own language.

With more than six decades as a leader in the space, PKF O’Connor Davies delivers insights and expertise that few firms bring to bear. We know what it takes to navigate the complex landscape and, more importantly, we’ve proven that we deliver the strategies and support to help our clients stay ahead of the curve.

It’s not bravado. It’s the confidence that comes from years of providing specialized accounting, auditing and consulting services to governments and agencies at the local, state and national levels. It’s a confidence our clients share.

With our team, they know greater insights. Know greater connections. Know greater confidence.