



It is the great pleasure of REI Women's Business Center to recommend Leche Lounge LLC to the national InnovateHER Challenge. Through the local competition hosted by REI Women's Business Center, Leche emerged as the winning submission not only because of their ability to meet and exceed all of the challenge criteria, but also because of their established strategic path for business and product growth. Leche offers a portable, and relatively inexpensive, lactation suite that enables businesses to comply with federal and state laws requiring nursing mothers be provided a space to pump breast milk in the workplace. These units offer businesses an affordable compliance solution, while offering nursing mothers privacy, convenience and the dignity they deserve. An explanation of Leche's defining features and strengths, including some interesting research provided by Leche, is included below.

The first Challenge criteria is '**a measurable impact on the lives of women and families**'. Leche has focused on an impactful societal issue: accessible accommodations for nursing/pumping mothers to utilize in the workforce that will allow both the mother/employee a safe and comfortable pumping option that permits them to remain productive in the workplace and their employer/the business to remain in compliance with federal law while sustaining workplace satisfaction and efficiency.

Leche's easily assembled lactation suites move beyond mere legal compliance mandated in the Affordable Care Act to instead allow businesses to choose to empower families over litigation and fines. Businesses currently paying fines due to noncompliance self-report that the inability to create a space to accommodate lactation is the reason for the noncompliance. Furthermore, some industries do not lend themselves to any type of private, appropriate space for lactation because of the nature of the business. Take, for instance, those working in the restaurant or retail industries. Coffee shops, delis, boutiques, etc, often have no employee accommodations. While corporate locations are frequently able to provide lactation rooms for their employees, other locations often are not. An example of this is both Starbucks and McDonald's. Both corporations comply with the federal mandate of a lactation space at their corporate offices but do not at the store locations and instead opt to pay fines. Leche endeavors to create a space that is an economical incentive for businesses to comply. Leche has even been contacted by a chief officer at one of these companies regarding their portable lactation suites.

To further illustrate the impact of Leche's lactation suites on the lives of women and families, it is noted that women having a clean, private place to pump in the workplace can increase their workplace and job satisfaction and lead to increased productivity, retention, and an improved return on investment for the employer's labor costs. Additional measureable impact of successful breastfeeding on the lives of women and families include:

- The cells, hormones, and antibodies in breast milk protect babies from illness. This protection is unique and changes to meet babies' needs. Research suggests that breastfed babies have lower risks of: Asthma; Childhood leukemia; Childhood obesity; Ear infections; Eczema (atopic dermatitis); Diarrhea and vomiting; lower respiratory infections; Necrotizing enter colitis, a disease that affects the gastrointestinal tract in pre-term infants; Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS); Type 2 diabetes.
- Mothers who breastfeed miss less work to care for sick infants than mothers who feed their infants formula. Employer medical costs are also lower.
- The United States would save an estimated \$2.2 billion per year on medical care costs for fully breastfed infants than never-breastfed infants. Breastfed infants usually need fewer sick care visits, prescriptions, and hospitalizations.

- Breastfeeding leads to a lower risk of these health problems in mothers including: Type 2 diabetes; certain types of breast cancer; ovarian cancer.<sup>1</sup>
- "The federal government's Healthy People 2010 initiative's breastfeeding goal is a 50% breast feeding rate at six months. Corporate America plays a big role in helping to achieve this goal, but sadly there are inconsistencies as new mothers at company headquarters are getting more support whereas those on the shop floor are not. In our survey, new moms told us their biggest barrier is the lack of a private, pumping-friendly environment and for some that means having to pump in a closet or bathroom stall," explains Irene Zoppi, RN, MSN, IBCLC, Medela's clinical breastfeeding education specialist.

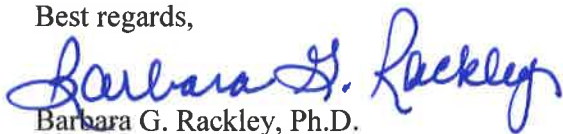
The second challenge criteria of '**potential for commercialization**' is tremendous as Leche has filed a utility patent and manufactured a working prototype. The initial Leche Express lactation suite is in beta testing and leaders at Leche are consulting not only with those utilizing the patent-pending suite but also with business owners as well as coworkers who work near the suite. Portability as well as handicap accessibility are also factors making these lactation suites extremely attractive to businesses and also increase potential for commercialization. Leche's leaders are continuing to facilitate relationships with manufacturers to make any improvements to the design, modify the materials to create a lighter unit that is easier to ship and assemble, and maximize profitability. Their goal is to build inventory and sales in 2016 and take pre-orders for 2017.

Another strength of Leche Lounge is their ability to "**fill a need in the marketplace**". The law requires employers to provide a space for mothers to express breast milk for up to one year following the birth of their child. The retail and restaurant industries in particular are in need of the Leche Express lactation suites because those businesses who hire a mother who is still nursing her child are required to provide accommodations to pump during the workday. How is a compact retail or restaurant location able to do this without knowing of her need? They must legally accommodate her when she reports to work for her first shift – sometimes in just a matter of days. With Leche Express, the business could potentially have a lactation suite already assembled, or they might have it in storage and need to assemble it, which is possible typically in less than 3 hours, and have a legally compliant space for the employee before her first break. This ensures the company will not face fines, litigation, or negative public relations implications from non-compliance.

It is the belief of Leche, based on extensive research, that businesses that support mothers by choosing to provide a lactation space experience improved employee morale, lower absenteeism, and working mothers who are more likely to return to work after childbirth. A study by the National Women's Health Resource Center (NWHRC), a leading independent health information source for women, found that 45% of working mothers cite the biggest physical barriers to breastfeeding in the workplace is the lack of a private pumping friendly environment. Leche Express is an ideal opportunity to create jobs while improving the health of women and families by providing a cost effective solution to regulatory compliance issues facing businesses across the nation.

It is for these reasons and more that REI Women's Business Center is proud to recommend Leche Lounge LLC to the national InnovateHER Challenge. If you have any questions about the information accompanying this recommendation please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,



Barbara G. Rackley, Ph.D.  
REI Women's Business Center

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-benefits.html>