

UNITED STATES LACTATION CONSULTANT ASSOCIATION

Advancing the lactation profession for the health of families everywhere.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Guiding Principles, and why are they important?

An organization's guiding principles provide the foundation for its existence and its aspirations and suggest the pathway for the future. Guiding principles also describe what the organization stands for and how it will do its work both in the near term and in the years to come.

For USLCA, they set up the association for the future. They are important to defining the association's purpose, its goals and the program of work it will undertake on behalf of its members. We are confident our new Guiding Principles will effectively serve as the foundation upon which USLCA will thrive and set us on a course that will better serve our profession and the clients and patients who need us.

The new Guiding Principles seem to signal a big change for USLCA. Will there still be a place for me?

Absolutely! We hope you take time to review USLCA's Guiding Principles, which are based on considerable research and evaluation. They were carefully crafted to embrace a mission that supports the unique needs of all lactation care providers and their aspirations. This includes those who have or are seeking the IBCLC credential, those who possess other levels of certification, or allied healthcare providers and breastfeeding supporters.

Is USLCA planning new programs that connect to the new Guiding Principles?

Yes, new programs and professional benefits will definitely be part of USLCA in the future as we work to broaden our reach, build greater recognition for lactation care providers on the healthcare team and in community health settings. We look forward to seeking member involvement as the planning for these new initiatives moves forward.

Is the term "lactation care providers" different from lactation care professional?

We believe care providers specializing in lactation who practice in a manner consistent with appropriate standards of care are "professional" which is why we prefer the term "lactation care providers". We believe the description better envelopes the breadth and range of our lactation care colleagues including those who do not practice in a clinical setting, such as educators or La Leche League leaders.

How did these changes come about?

The culmination of this milestone began months ago as USLCA leadership recognized that the association needed to re-evaluate its purpose and to broaden its scope. We faced marginal membership growth, low awareness beyond our members, and a fragmented profession of care providers that, as a result of their fragmentation, seemed to be working at cross purposes.

With the larger healthcare and community health environment transforming around us, we embarked on a year of rediscovering the true soul of our association. The board did not embark on this groundbreaking work this past year alone. Partnering with a consulting team with extensive experience in strategic research, organizational brand development and representation of organizations in the healthcare arena, allowed us to examine USLCA through a wider lens. Through that examination we looked at related best practices among other professional health organizations, sought the insight of peers, interviewed colleagues both inside and outside USLCA and tested ideas that were designed to innovate and improve our association.

The research was enlightening and it helped guide us to a path forward, and to move beyond our current organizational comfort zone to be better and to more relevant in serving both today's membership and new members we will work to attract. The research also helped us see the value of building stronger relationships and greater collaboration among professional peer groups and the broader family healthcare team. We believe building these stronger bridges will lead to greater respect and recognition for the profession and respect for the role of lactation care providers across all communities.

We're glad you're seeking this kind of clarification. We encourage the questions and comments and hope over time, as you become more acquainted with the Guiding Principles and opportunities for putting them into action, you find the underlying purpose both compelling and embracing.

Does USLCA still support "licensure"?

USLCA's support of the concept of licensure has not changed. We have, however, developed a greater understanding of the impact licensure has at the state level and the larger ramifications of the inequities and disparities in accessing quality healthcare. Given the current healthcare environment in the United States, we recognize that licensure is one way to achieve recognition among the entire healthcare team. Licensure is one avenue to elevate the profession. Improving access to care through stronger insurance provisions, including reimbursement, and sustainable vocational development and growth that benefit all lactation care providers are equally important priorities, as well.

Due to the varying complexities of regulatory processes from state to state, we recognize that each bill written and law and regulation enacted will likely have distinct differences. Despite these variables, however, we believe strongly in one constant: that efforts to integrate licensing of those who practice lactation care should be accomplished in an inclusive manner that does not restrict the practice of any providers not addressed in the licensing requirements.

We are grateful for the foundational efforts to date related to licensure, as we navigate the complexities of healthcare as an entire profession. Enhancing our skills through expanded learning and development while working to further integrate lactation into the broader healthcare landscape will benefit, not only the profession, but also those who receive our care.

Does USLCA still advocate for the IBCLC?

Yes! USLCA unequivocally supports the role of the IBCLC in lactation care as the clinical experts who possess the breadth of training and knowledge to address the most complex of lactation issues in the clinical setting. Our support for IBCLCs and their specialized professional development has not changed, nor will it change. The role of IBCLCs in our association, however, does not preclude USLCA from expanding its program offerings to support advancement of other providers. In fact, broadening USLCA's programs can actually promote interest in the IBCLC credential as providers take advantage of professional opportunities to advance their careers and consider a pathway toward becoming an IBCLC. Embracing and promoting more opportunities within the profession should absolutely be at the core of USLCA's program of work. Not only does it strengthen the profession, it also encourages more interest in the profession and begins to address disparities in the field. Through professional development, mentorship opportunities, and other valuable resources, this important work will ensure longevity of the profession and the health of children and families.

Was the broadening of USLCA's scope a financial decision?

The financial stability of USLCA is one of the primary responsibilities of the elected board of directors. The new Guiding Principles were developed from evidence-based research and are strategically intended to broaden the mission of USLCA as a foundation to build a wider membership base, increase professional development opportunities, and, in turn, create greater sustainability of the association. USLCA did not accept any outside funding to influence its actions. And, the rolling membership cycle of USLCA, and the fact that membership renewals come in 365 days a year, means that the association was not set to financially gain or lose by the timing of this work. Rather, the new year posed an opportunity for a fresh start and a giant leap forward.

USLCA's new mission does not include a reference to the IBCLC credential or to IBCLCs in particular. Why is it not referenced? Is the new mission an endorsement of other lactation care credentials and is supporting the IBCLC credential no longer an association priority?

The adoption of USLCA's new Guiding Principles does not diminish the Association's support for IBCLCs or for any professional development opportunities and programming that:

- Create and attract both new and broader interest in achieving the IBCLC credential
- Support training
- Improve clinical skills or
- Build greater recognition and respect for the advanced expertise

As an organization seeking to elevate and advance the field of lactation care, the IBCLC credential is a cornerstone of that effort. That said, however, it is also imperative that we recognize that the spectrum of lactation care goes beyond the universe of IBCLCs. Lactation care providers who are not IBCLCs today are providing an important service in communities all across the country. It is shortsighted on our part if we are not engaging these dedicated individuals to help connect them more to the healthcare team and to interest them in deeper training opportunities that advance their skills through similar avenues as IBCLCs seeking to advance theirs.

Extending USLCA's Mission and Vision opens up opportunities to create stronger pathways to advancing the profession for all care providers and attracts interest from a wider group of stakeholders. This also gives USLCA an opportunity to demonstrate the Association's eagerness to work more collaboratively with other groups to support lactation care professional development across all skill levels. In fact, it is incumbent on us to actively support pipeline opportunities that increase interest in the profession so that our Vision is achieved -- to extend the reach of lactation care providers to all communities.

Please keep in mind that awareness and recognition of what "IBCLC" is -- including what it means and why it is significant -- is truly lacking beyond the relatively small community of IBCLCs and those with whom they work closely. As a descriptor, the acronym does not stand out in significance among those we serve and care for and even among the broader healthcare team. This weakens our strong professional desire and need to achieve greater stature as care providers serving a vitally important role, and it blurs the distinction even among the lactation care credentials. Our new Guiding Principles purposely place emphasis on advancing the profession so that what we do and why we exist as an organization resonate with the widest audience we can reach.

Is USLCA planning to maintain the availability of the IBCLC directory on the Association web page?

USLCA fully intends to continue providing the resources on the Association website that support IBCLCs, including the Find an IBCLC directory and Mentorship Directory.