

AMB

THE INQUIRY

"The Committee shall inquire into and report on how the Commonwealth government can take a lead role to improve the health of the Australian population through support for breastfeeding. The Committee shall give particular consideration to:

- a. *the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding;*
- b. *evaluate the impact of marketing of breast milk substitutes on breastfeeding rates and, in particular, in disadvantaged, Indigenous and remote communities;*
- c. *the potential short and long term impact on the health of Australians of increasing the rate of breastfeeding;*
- d. *initiatives to encourage breastfeeding;*
- e. *examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding;*
- f. *the impact of breastfeeding on the long term sustainability of Australia's health system."*

Some of these areas I feel would be better addressed by health professionals who have qualifications and expertise in this. The following however are the areas I would like to submit as a mother of young children.

d. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding;

This is an area which I feel our current system is failing. At the professional level many hospitals provide breastfeeding help to the new mother however often her milk has not yet even 'come in' until she goes home. It is usually not in those first few days that the issues of poor supply, cracked nipples, poor attachment, mastitis and other difficulties occur.

It is in the following weeks that many women run into difficulties and there should be many more Lactation Consultants freely available to visit new mothers in their homes at the times they are needed. There is no point saying 10:00 on Tuesday if the baby is not hungry then. There is also the issue that if help isn't IMMEDIATELY available the problem usually increases and often new parents turn to the bottle out of pure frustration which then hinders the process of breastfeeding. If the woman is suffering from lack of supply for instance her supply will decrease by introducing bottles and if it is poor attachment the mothers nipples will just get worse at each feed not better so it needs to be addressed straight away.

Ideally a lactation consultant should be able to visit all new mothers 2-3 times in the first week and then do a follow up visit the following week. There should then be an aim to keep in contact with the mother throughout the following MONTHS to try and help and assist the mother to Breastfeed for longer than just that initial period. If Maternal Health nurses were better trained in breastfeeding then more mothers may feel comfortable in approaching them as well.

Membership to the Australian Breastfeeding Association should be subsidised and any memberships made or products purchased from the ABA should be fully tax deductible. More funding needs to be provided for counselors to provide up to date training for them as well as to increase their free assistance to new mothers.

e. examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding;

In all honesty the current measures are failing. This is shown by the fact that the majority of children are ending up using formula as very, very few are breastfed until at least 12 months (let alone the 2 years the WHO recommends.) Society sees breastfeeding in a negative way and does not offer a lot of support to new mothers and the myths are astounding.

Some of the myths I regularly encountered when I was Breastfeeding

- You can not produce enough milk to adequately feed a baby
- If the child isn't sleeping well it is due to bad quality milk
- After the first month or two there are no nutritional benefits of breastfeeding
- If the child wants to feed more than 4 hourly you aren't producing enough milk to keep it going long enough
- It isn't healthy for the mother to keep breastfeeding
- You must wean if you fall pregnant

This however is not even including the attitudes that I heard

- It is disgusting to breastfeed a child over 3 months
- You are spoiling the child and making it too attached to you
- No-one wants to see you 'getting your boobs out'
- Breasts are just sexual objects not to be used for feeding
- Formula is so much easier so don't bother getting your breasts saggy when you don't have to

Without the support of extended family and her partner many women are giving up breastfeeding way too easily. Education needs to be provided to the community as a WHOLE and not just focused on the new mothers as it seems to be at the moment. A television campaign that promotes breastfeeding would be fantastic. It would need to have the benefits of breastmilk (which most people still don't know), ways to encourage a mother to feed until AT LEAST 12 months and phone numbers etc. of where to call at the first sign of difficulties before the problem gets too large. Trying to bust some of the myths surrounding breastfeeding would be wonderful too. I doubt that putting lots of babies being breastfed all over the television would help as unfortunately too many people just 'switch off' to that so a modest education campaign would be excellent in a 'Did you know that?' kind of way.

I would ideally like to see a large-ish poster in ALL Health centres and doctors clinics. This needs to not only be in places that mothers go to but also the community in general as they are the support people too. The poster would need to

- Encourage women to aim to breastfeed for at least 12 months. There is so much community pressure not to Breastfeed for 'that long' and most mothers only aim for the first few months at the most. I know the WHO recommends until 2 years but I think that is probably an unrealistic target at this stage.
- Show that Breastmilk is the best, is adequate, that you can produce enough AND who to call if you are worried it isn't working BEFORE BEGINNING bottles

(as too many people are jumping straight to the bottle and jeopardising their breastfeeding that way)

- Show the benefits of breastmilk which still too few people know about. Perhaps in a 'Top Ten' sort of way that catches the eye.

Too often women who try to help others breastfed are seen as being pushy. Unfortunately the term 'breastfeeding nazi' has become common. This is because the community has embraced bottle-feeding as the normal way to feed a baby so being told otherwise goes against societal attitude and this NEEDS to be reversed for the health of our children. Breast-feeding should be seen as the optimum way for ALL children to be fed for at least 12 months until weaning.