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Submission - Inquiry into Breastfeeding

This submission seeks to address just one of the many health benefits of Breastfeeding for the Mother. That is, **Breastfeeding reduces the Mother's risk of Breast Cancer¹**. Many current texts, journals and other literature will support this claim. This submission addresses several of the *terms of reference*, including a,c,d,e and f. Studies are showing that Breastfeeding reduces the risk of Ovarian cancers also, but this submission focuses on the reduced risk of Breast Cancer.

The past few years in Australia has seen a growing "awareness" of the issue of Breast Cancer for women. The month of October has become "Breast Cancer Awareness" month, and during this month in particular, one sees a myriad of pink merchandise, and items featuring the "pink ribbon" symbol, to promote Breast Cancer Awareness. A sceptic would say that Breast Cancer has become a trendy issue, and the chosen "charity of choice" for big business, as part of their overall marketing campaigns, designed to win support and favour from their markets. Such campaigning surely has benefits in reminding women to have themselves screened regularly for the disease. **But how much better it would be if such print campaigns, printed information and "pink things", also featured useful advice for women on reducing their risk!**

Prevention is better than cure. One of the things women can do to reduce their risk, is to breastfeed their babies, and for as long as possible. For every month of her life that a woman breastfeeds a child, this reduced risk is enhanced further². No, it does not mean that she will never develop breast cancer, but it is certainly a step towards reducing the risk!

So, what can the Australian Government do?

- Fund adequate Breastfeeding Education programmes, which include the advice that Breastfeeding reduces your risk of developing Breast Cancer. The author believes this information should be disseminated to women early in their lives, as it is knowledge they need to be armed with, and the Government has a responsibility to provide them with, well before starting a family.
 - Some would argue that giving such advice, or "warning", is scare mongering, or using "scare tactics", but the author is of the

opinion this is simply scientific, factual information, that the Government needs to make sure women have.

- Such advice would need to reach any woman who could potentially breastfeed - women who may bear children, women currently breastfeeding, women who could potentially adopt a child or children, or women who have adopted children (adoptive breastfeeding).
- Give incentives to large businesses who are "corporate partners" of the large Breast Cancer organizations - the National Breast Cancer Centre, and the National Breast Cancer Foundation - to have advice printed on the now very widely available Breast Cancer Awareness merchandise and materials, that Breastfeeding reduces the risk of Breast Cancer.
- In Australia we have very strict legislation about the packaging of cigarettes, namely that they must bear certain warnings on their packaging, pertaining to health risks. Perhaps the Government should legislate, not so much for "warnings", but printed "advice", on cans of artificial breast milk, that Breastfeeding reduces your risk of Breast Cancer.
- Conduct surveys to determine the current awareness amongst women of varying ages, about this particular health benefit of Breastfeeding. Such surveys could also extend to men, as studies have shown that women are more likely to succeed in Breastfeeding if they have the support of male partners.

1. Day, Jill (Editor) - Breastfeeding...Naturally. Australian Breastfeeding Association, Australia, 2006.
2. The Lancet (2002; 360: 187-95).