



Dear Sir/Madam,

I am grateful to be given the opportunity to participate in this inquiry. I am a mum of two boys; my 3-year-old was breastfed to 19 months and my 16-month-old is still breastfeeding. It was my family's support and the invaluable assistance from the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) that helped me continue. The health system as I experienced it was, in general, poorly equipped to assist me with breastfeeding.

I will address terms d and e of the inquiry's Terms of Reference, as I feel most able to comment on these and I will start in reverse order by examining the current measures I experienced, then list some initiatives I think would help.

e. Examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding

I think the best way to promote breastfeeding is to make it as uncomplicated as possible for parents. Here is what I experienced with current practices that made it more confusing or difficult for me:

- Contact with several midwives while at hospital, all of whom gave different, conflicting and sometimes detrimental breastfeeding advice.
- No followup appointments were offered or arranged, except by me and at my expense.
- Started attending a 6-week New Parents class at my local Queensland Health child health centre. Left after one session when incorrect and age-inappropriate sleep and feeding advice was dispensed.
- No health professionals told me about any breastfeeding resources available to me - my mother was the one who put me on to the ABA.
- Plenty of information about the "benefits of breastfeeding" and common problems in the early days of breastfeeding, but scant information about what to do and what happens *after* the first few months.
- Legislation that is not expansive enough to prevent companies advertising their products (like artificial toddler milks and "breastfeeding" multivitamins) in a way that suggests my milk is insufficient without their multivitamins or unnecessary because their product is just as good.

Here's the assistance I received that was very helpful:

- Access to the 7-day free ABA helpline that costs only a local phone call as well as online support via internet forum and email counselling - without having to be a subscriber.
- Access to local ABA group meetings, attended by a qualified counsellor
- Current, standardised and evidence-based information and advice from the ABA.
- Stayed in (private) hospital until my milk had come in.
- Childcare centre and work policies that supported breastfeeding. Both places encouraged me to breastfeed my son during short, frequent breaks (the childcare centre was next to my workplace).

d. Initiatives to encourage breastfeeding

Some suggestions:

1. Funding for a national toll-free, 24-hour telephone helpline to expand the localised services being provided by the ABA (already provided to all parents, not just members). Funding for the promotion of this helpline on national television, magazine and radio.
2. Subsidising antenatal Breastfeeding Education Courses, which the ABA already provides, through the medicare system.
3. Emphasising the role of employers in providing suitable facilities and lactation breaks
4. Breastpumps and accessories to be work-related tax-deductible items.
5. Paid maternity leave of 6 months minimum and unpaid leave up until two years, per the NH&MRC and World Health Organisation breastfeeding recommendations. The ability to take unpaid leave in a block or in several instalments, within two years of giving birth.
6. The option to halt mortgage payments or convert to interest-only loans for 6 months to encourage exclusive breastfeeding.
7. All healthcare professionals in regular contact with babies and mothers to have a minimum level of breastfeeding education, equivalent to the ABA Breastfeeding Education Class, which is regularly updated.
8. All hospitals to be party to the World Health Organisation's "Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative", which supports and encourages breastfeeding. Adopt the WHO growth standards for all healthcare providers and in all baby books. Full implementation of the WHO's International Code on the Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes.
9. Medicare-subsidised home visits from Lactation Consultants in the early days to address problems and encourage breastfeeding.
10. Offer medicare-subsidised membership to the ABA for one year as part of the birth registration process, free membership for 'at risk' groups in the community
11. "Human milk banks" to be set up in major hospitals (at least one per state) with specialised training for breastfeeding premature babies. Free breast pump hire to all mums of premature babies as well as subsidised or free support by a Lactation Consultant and membership to the ABA.
12. Government health websites to recognise the value of human milk with regards to toddlers' nutritional, immunological and emotional well-being.

Although governments and health professionals promote the message that "breast is best" with public health campaigns, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the biggest problem is not that parents don't know *why* they should breastfeed (over 80% of Australian babies in 2001 were breastfed after being discharged from hospital¹); the problem lies in the *how* of breastfeeding; the mechanics of it, what's normal and how to solve problems. There are too few organisations and individuals out there with the current breastfeeding knowledge and willingness to regularly update their information to help us after we leave hospital with our new babies. We are largely left to our own devices to sort through the confusing maze of conflicting information at a time when we feel most vulnerable. I'll close with a question I hope the inquiry will answer and suggest a remedy for:

Why is it that the *only* organisation set up specifically to protect, promote and support breastfeeding in Australia (the Australian Breastfeeding Association) is a not-for-profit organisation run by dedicated volunteer parents in their spare time, and not a publicly-funded health organisation staffed by full-time professionals?

With regards,

Nicole Burns

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4810.0.55.001 - *Breastfeeding in Australia, 2001*