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Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
House of Representatives
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Inquiry into Breastfeeding

Submission Sent by: Narelle Batterham

Terms of Reference responded to in this submission are section b. and d. (reiterated below).

"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:

b. evaluate the impact of marketing of breast milk substitutes on breastfeeding rates and, in particular, in disadvantaged, Indigenous and remote communities;

d. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding

I am a mother of 3 children and have breastfed all of my children. I am currently still breastfeeding my last child who is now 14 months old and I plan to do so until she reaches about 2 (following recommendations from World Health Organisation).

My commitment to my children once I had them was to give them the best possible start in life and I believe we have enough research and information available now to know that breastfeeding is by far superior than artificial milk (formula) or milk substitutes.

Breastfeeding should be encouraged, encouraged, encouraged and supported, supported, supported by the health system to make it a choice that we agree is not always easy, but does get easier, given the right advice and support.

I urge this Committee from the DHA to seek all necessary research, and with this research, make sure it is used to commence extensive public awareness programs both in urban and rural areas, with concentrated efforts in demographic areas that are showing a lower rate in breastfeeding.

In my points below, I have made some suggestions on ways I think we need to tackle both this issues of increasing breastfeeding rates, the marketing and purchase of breast milk substitutes and initiatives to encourage breastfeeding.

1. Have accessible and free education programs. Ensuring the programs promote breastfeeding as the normal way to feed a baby. We need to turn around general public opinion that milk substitutes are "just as good as breast milk".
2. Ensure key partners in hospital after-care are recognized and supported by the Health system. Evidence shows that community based care and voluntary organisations which offer SUPPORT, such as the Australian Breastfeeding Association, play a key role in increasing the breastfeeding rates in our society.
3. Commence implementation of New Growth charts immediately, ensuring that all areas of health are covered, including remote. (Old growth charts should be recalled).
4. Tighter legislations around promotion and sale of milk substitutes. (Adherence to the WHO code of marketing of breast milk substitutes). Sale of such substitutes to be limited to chemist only rather than being readily available at any supermarket.
5. A Public health campaign that:
 - a. cuts to the very core of the benefits of breastfeeding,
 - b. emphasizes possible side effects of choosing to feed newborns artificial milk, and,
 - c. normalises feeding a baby beyond their first year of life.

I believe we are being far too concerned with ensuring we are not 'offensive and intrusive', when it comes to the subject of feeding choice. Yes, we need to give people the choice, however, in doing so, we need to ensure they are fully educated and have all the facts clearly set before them. Let's ensure we don't limit greater knowledge to those in higher social-economic areas...Please don't forget those in the community that would most benefit from a breastfeeding relationship with their children.

Thanking you for your consideration of this submission.

Yours sincerely,
Narelle Batterham