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I am sending this Submission to the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding as a mother of one child, breastfed until the age of 3 years and who has just turned 20. I am also a volunteer breastfeeding counsellor, qualified in 1991 with the Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia now known as the Australian Breastfeeding Association. I have enjoyed the many benefits of breastfeeding my own child, I believe she has gained life long health benefits from the extended breastfeeding and nurturing throughout her life. This was done against the advice of most health professionals that I visited, I was told not to feed her as often as I did and that my baby should be able to go for 4 hours without a feed and sleep through the night, I believe this is an unrealistic expectation of a baby or a toddler. I was also told that there was no nutritional value in breastmilk after 6 months; I have since learned that this is so far from the truth that it is very sad that a health professional actually made this comment. Again, I was told to leave her to cry and not to attend to her needs, definitely do not let her sleep in our bed as we would be making a rod for our own back if this were to happen. I believe my daughter is a confident, well adjusted young lady all from being breastfed for 3 years, me spending a lot of time nurturing and meeting her needs as a baby and toddler, it was hard work at the time but very worthwhile and rewarding. I found it very confusing as a new mother, I wanted to follow my instincts but was being given all this conflicting information. When my daughter was 16 weeks of age I eventually attended a local meeting of the Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia, by this stage I had felt a real failure, I was struggling to breastfeed with all the conflicting information I have received. I had always expected I would breastfeed my baby but I didn't expect life with a new baby to be so full on and to receive so much conflicting information. I found that the volunteer breastfeeding counsellors encouraged me to follow my instincts, that I couldn't over feed my breastfed baby and they supported me in the way I wanted to look after my baby. It was so good to find like minded mothers who cared about the benefits of breastfeeding and who had trained to support other mothers in the community. After being supported through my breastfeeding experience, I trained to become a volunteer breastfeeding counsellor to help and support other mums in the community. I have enjoyed for the last 15 years being able to provide up-to-date breastfeeding information, encourage and supporting new mums to successfully breastfeed their babies.

Over the years the same concerns are raised year after year about conflicting information being given to mums by health professionals, family and friends. All too often breastfeeding is not seen as the normal way to

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breastfeed a baby. Generally most mums do feel that breastfeeding is the best way to feed their baby, but don't realise how important it is to learn about breastfeeding before they have the baby and how important it is to have the correct information to make informed choices about breastfeeding and to have support from other mothers who have successfully breastfed their own children.

Some of ways we could improve breastfeeding rates in this country are:

- I believe all mothers and fathers-to-be would benefit from attending a breastfeeding education class during their pregnancy.
- Mothers and fathers have to want to breastfeed their baby and this will come from a change in the communities perception that breastfeeding is the normal way to feed a baby and that any other form of feeding is an abnormal way of feeding.
- Employ Lactation Consultants in all maternity wards.
- Help all maternity hospitals to achieve 'Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative' status
- More breastfeeding education for health professionals throughout their training.
- All health professionals need to be up-to-date with the latest breastfeeding information and give the same information to new parents.
- Continuing breastfeeding education for health professionals and for them to be competent in the basics of breastfeeding information.
- Health professionals to suggest that mums make contact with their local breastfeeding support groups while they are pregnant and soon after the baby is born.
- Young children from Prep through to high school to have breastfeeding education as a normal part of the curriculum, these children need to be exposed to this information. Starting with the reading of books to young children that depict breastfeeding and not that of babies being artificially fed. Information sessions as part of the curriculum for high school students is also important to inform them of the considerable benefits of breastfeeding and the risks of giving artificial baby milk to babies. This can have a lasting positive impact on them for the choice they make when they are at child bearing age.
- Extensive media advertising to portray breastfeeding as the normal way to feed a baby.
- Exclude advertising of artificial baby milk and toddler milks.
- Severe penalties for any breaches of the Marketing of Infant Formula agreement and a much stricter monitoring of the companies who continually and blatantly breach the agreement.
- Artificial baby milk only to be available by prescription.
- Support for Mothers Milk Banks so that those babies who cannot access their own mother's milk can still be fed on breastmilk.
- Government \$\$\$\$\$ to support the Australian Breastfeeding Association and the many projects they are involved in to provide breastfeeding information, resources and the support they offer in the community.

It is important for the future health of our nation that our babies are breastfed exclusively for at least the first 6 months and in accordance to the World Health Organizations recommendations for babies to continue to be breastfed for up to 2 years and beyond.

I am delighted by the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding which hopefully will lead to better breastfeeding outcomes and experiences for many more women in this country.

Warm regards,

Maria Addison