

From:

Cathy Garbin: research associate and lactation consultant
The Human Lactation Research Group
Department of Biomedical, biomolecular and chemical science
The University of Western Australia
35 Stirling Highway
Crawley 6009
Western Australia
Phone 08 64883327

Internationally, research continues to prove the benefits of breastfeeding, to clarify how breast milk is made, and to help mothers who seem to be unable to breastfeed. One of the leaders of this research is Professor Peter Hartmann of The University of Western Australia. He has recently won two international awards, the Macy-Gyorgy Award in 2006 and the La Leche League in 2007 in recognition of his outstanding, original scientific contributions to the study of human milk and lactation. His work has been recognized internationally and his papers have appeared in excellent peer-reviewed journals.

Breastfeeding is the very best way to nourish babies. It promotes optimum mental, emotional and physical health for both the mother and baby. Society in general greatly benefits when fewer unsustainable resources are needed to produce breastmilk substitutes, health costs are lower because of better health outcomes (less rates of obesity, higher IQ rates for children, less ear and chest infections). The extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding to mother, child and family are very well researched, far reaching and undisputable.

The impact of marketing of breast milk substitutes took its toll in the 1960s on Australian breastfeeding rates. The Australian Breastfeeding Association and

dedicated individuals have helped counteract this. However the impact is still being felt, particularly in the more socially disadvantaged groups, the very group where higher breastfeeding rates would greatly benefit their health, social and economic status.

The initiation rates of breastfeeding in Australia are now at 92%. Within weeks the rate dramatically falls as problems such as low milk supply, sore nipples and infections beset the dyad. Antenatal education and then education and support for the first 6 weeks after birth is where most help is now needed to prevent and solve problems. **The government and private health insurers could provide more support in the form of medicare rebates for lactation consults and the provision of lactation support services for all maternity patients to help breastfeeding families overcome difficulties and to proceed with what they already wish to do, breastfeed their babies. Education of the general public as well as ongoing updating education for all health professionals dealing with breastfeeding families is another area where government support would greatly aid the plight of the breastfeeding family.**

Breastfeeding is "the grass roots" for good nutrition standards in Australia.

The long term sustainability of Australia's health system can be improved with higher and more sustained breastfeeding rates. Mother and baby's health are better, the cost of health services for these individuals is thus less. Less unsustainable resources are required to produce breastmilk, resulting in less cost to produce, less pollution and waste products.