

Submission no. 356
AUTHORISED: 23/5/07 *MC*

The La Leche League in New Zealand is a not-for-profit community organisation that supports breastfeeding mothers with morning tea meetings, workshops, non-threatening advice and support. Perhaps some seed funding to set up similar support groups in Australia would improve the rate of breastfeeding in the community.

Maternity leave should be extended for breastfeeding mothers. Although breastfeeding can be continued when a mother is in the workplace, circumstances and lack of time and facilities make it more difficult and less likely to be continued. Sophisticated mechanical breast pumps with refrigerated compartment to preserve the milk are available to assist a working mother, but these are expensive and probably beyond the means of most working women. Funding for and promotion of this type of equipment would be helpful.

Government (Abstudy) funding is provided for Indigenous students living in remote areas to travel to universities and TAFE colleges for study and "block release". However, the babe is usually weaned to enable the mother to travel for study. Government (Abstudy) funding does not provide for travel or accommodation for the adult carer for the babe, which would enable the mother to study and maintain breastfeeding. I am a teacher in RATEP –a community based teacher education program which works to increase the pool of qualified Indigenous teachers (and I am dismayed to see how often the babe is weaned to allow the mother to travel).

Breastfeeding benefits the babe by providing immunity to infectious disease, and yet I have never seen this advantage promoted in Australia.

Childbirth and the care of the mother and newborn is almost exclusively the responsibility of hospitals and doctors in Australia. People who have not themselves breastfed are not able to promote breastfeeding from a position of confidence and authority. In New Zealand, where there is strong financial support for midwives and home birthing, there is stronger support for the womanly art of breastfeeding. It is a womanly art, and until women who have themselves breastfed are allowed more influence in the support and management of new mothers and newborn babes, there is unlikely to be any increase in the rate of breastfeeding.

Linda Price (grandmother)

!DEPTSTAMP!

9/05/2007