

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Breastfeeding. As a mother of two children who has spent more than three years breastfeeding I feel most qualified to comment on

- A. the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding
- D. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding
- E. examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding

**A. the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding**

There are numerous health benefits of breastfeeding for both the mother and child. My knowledge comes from resources provided by the Australian Breastfeeding Association and other book and journal articles. World Health Organisation guidelines state babies should be exclusively breastfed to six months; solids introduced at six months and the baby to be breastfed to two years of age or longer.

Benefits to the child include:-

- Receiving the ideal food designed for human infants. The feed changes throughout the day and over the months to meet the child's needs.
- Antibodies to fight infection
- Bonding with the mother
- Jaw development
- Better health prospects in later life such as reduced risk of allergies and diabetes

Benefits to the mother include:-

- An easily available food that is ideal for her baby
- Aids in contraction of the uterus after the birth and reducing weight gained during the pregnancy
- No cost of formula, bottles, sterilizing
- Convenience (no preparing of bottles)
- Reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancer, heart disease and osteoporosis in later life

#### **D. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding**

- Better education of all health care professionals who deal with families (GPs, midwives, Early Childhood nurses) on the benefits of breastfeeding
- More support in hospitals – follow the “Baby Friendly Hospitals initiative”; staff to spend sufficient time with the new mother; perhaps breastfeeding groups each day; not pushing the mother out of hospital too soon after giving birth- to help the mother establish breastfeeding
- Better follow up in the community eg after my first baby was born I was told no one from the baby health clinic could do a home visit for several weeks. If a mother is having problems breastfeeding this is too late.
- Support for the Australian Breastfeeding Association:- promoting it so women know where they can get help; make the helpline a free call number; perhaps subsidise breastfeeding classes for high risk groups prior to the birth of the baby.
- Use the new WHO growth charts that reflect the growth of breastfed babies. The current growth charts are based on a 40 year old study of mostly breastfed babies in the United States. Using the new growth charts would mean breastfeeding mothers do not feel their babies are underweight and thus confident that their milk is providing all the baby needs.
- Label baby food to say recommended for 6 months plus to fit in with WHO guidelines of starting solids at 6 months
- Sale of formula only at chemists rather than supermarkets and discount stores (such as Big W, K Mart)
- Adhere to the WHO/ UNICEF code of marketing for breast milk substitutes i.e. no advertising of these products including “toddler milks”
- A public health campaign to educate people in the benefits of breastfeeding both for babies and toddlers. Advertising on TV and magazines especially those aimed at young women. Help make breastfeeding seen as the normal way to feed a baby. The wider community also needs this information so they can support mothers.
- Support for women at work while children are young e.g. breaks to express milk

### **E. examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding**

In my own experiences I encountered several barriers

- Inconsistent advice from health professionals
- Hospital staff not always available to assist in establishing feeding
- I felt I was being encouraged to leave hospital as soon as possible rather than when I was ready and able to feed my babies without help
- Lack of follow up support e.g. no one available to visit from early childhood clinic; the clinic only open twice a week
- Attitudes of people around me did not support breastfeeding. For vulnerable groups this pressure to use formula either from the start or after a few months could lead to the end of breastfeeding

Thank you for considering my submission

Sarah Phillips