



House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Health & Aging  
Inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding  
Submission from: Australian Lactation Consultants Association, Victorian Branch

ALCA VIC represents International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) within the state of Victoria. Members work in a variety of roles in hospitals, maternal & child health centres (infant health centres), and privately with women and their families from pre-pregnancy through to postnatal within the community.

According to the World Health Organization's recommendations breastfeeding should be exclusive for the first six months of babies' lives with a gradual introduction of family foods (solids) while continuing to breastfeed for two years and beyond. Much research has been conducted into the benefits and normality of breastfeeding and breastmilk. (See attached append.) Breastfeeding has shown clear advantages in providing normal growth patterns with good oral-facial development, and fewer gastro-intestinal illnesses. This leads into lower health care costs and better quality of life for the entire family.

While initiation rates of breastfeeding in Australia are good, the knowledge of the hazards of not breastfeeding are not well known. Many in the community and some health professionals believe that artificial formula is as good as breastmilk. The commercial manufacturers of artificial formula spend considerable money promoting a product that can and has caused harmful effects. Quality research evidence depicts the hazards of artificial formula and the health advantages of breastfeeding to the mother and baby.

In order for the government to reach their targets for breastfeeding rates and duration by 2010, there is a need for more detailed action plans. ALCA VIC is aware of the following areas that need further assistance:

- ▶ Education, pre-pregnancy, antenatal and postnatal should be freely available to all women and young adults. Programs need to be promoted to the young, disadvantaged, CALD and Aboriginal women through peer support and health professional support.
- ▶ National co-ordination to assist local area support and promotion of breastfeeding as the norm.
- ▶ Tightening of the MAIF Agreement to address new products and the advertising of associated products that can interfere with breastfeeding. Broadening the MAIF Agreement to include products such as toddler follow-on formula, pharmacy own brands and pacifiers, dummies and teats.
- ▶ Prohibiting the sponsorship of health professional education, seminars, conferences and print materials by manufacturers and commercial marketers of artificial formulas.
- ▶ Promotion of the normality of breastfeeding. This would include use of appropriate language to provide accurate information about the known hazards of artificial formulas and providing a true informed choice for women.

Further strategies should be implemented to increase the length of time babies are breastfed.

These strategies include:

- ▶ Including the normality of breastfeeding in educational materials at all levels.
- ▶ Development and promotion of breastfeeding in all types of media, e.g. print, TV, public transport, internet
- ▶ Promote antenatal education and work to include social disadvantaged and CALD groups through a multidisciplinary model of midwives, IBCLC lactation consultants, child health nurses and volunteer support, Australian Breastfeeding Association breastfeeding counsellors and community educators.
- ▶ Promote and increase postnatal and discharge information and support for breastfeeding mothers.
- ▶ Support and require all health facilities to reach Baby Friendly Health Initiative standards.
- ▶ Promote and encourage workplaces to develop support for breastfeeding staff through maternity leave and breaks upon return to work.
- ▶ Provide Medicare and health care fund rebates for women to access timely lactation assistance through private and hospital IBCLCs'.
- ▶ Increased support of community support programs to increase length of time of breastfeeding

ALCA VIC is a branch of ALCA National and is presenting this submission as support for the national submission as well as a submission in its own right.

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Appendix:

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