

The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir,

I am a father of three children aged three, four and five.

I have been fortunate to observe over the last five years the close bonds developed, at least partially via breastfeeding, between my wife and our three children and have felt privileged to have been able to support her. Our children have been exclusively breastfed to six months and have had complementary feeds well past that time until they have weaned themselves. Our three year old still feeds regularly and finds solace in this in any times of distress.

The main benefits of breastfeeding, however, are undoubtedly the well established health benefits, both direct and indirect. The most natural source of nutrition for babies and infants is also the most balanced with benefits to the immune system of the child and the impact of reduction of childhood obesity. The increase in obesity poses one of the major health concerns to our society today for people of all ages. Breastfeeding also has benefits to the health of the mother with reduction in the incidence of cancer.

The low incidence of exclusive breastfeeding to six months and complementary feeding thereafter, as recommended by the World Health Organisation for both developed and developing countries, is a result of poor education and societal attitudes as well as a lack of follow through on well meaning government policy. Breastfeeding often becomes too difficult because workplaces and all areas outside the home lack decent facilities to assist mothers. Workplace practices also do not lend themselves to supporting breastfeeding despite often promoted "family friendly" policies and expediency is the inevitable and understandable result.

Education of the wider community is also essential. It is easy to feel the discomfort of others when a mother breastfeeds in public and this, no doubt, impacts on the preparedness of mothers to do so. It is truly unfortunate when we consider the ease with which we have come to accept many less than positive images of women in public, that so many are embarrassed by one of the most beautiful interactions between two human beings.

The Government is to be commended in initiating this inquiry into a vital factor in the health of our children.

Yours faithfully,

Bruce Cameron