

## **Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Breastfeeding**

There are numerous studies that have supported the importance of breastfeeding for mothers and babies. Breastfeeding positively affects the baby's overall health status and the nutritional and psychological development of the baby. It also brings many health and fertility spacing benefits to the mother. For the family and wider community there is a continuation of health benefits as well as economic advantages.

This is well documented in the Dietary Guidelines for Children & Adolescents In Australia, NH&MRC, 2003 & the NSW Breastfeeding Policy: Promoting, Protecting and Supporting Breastfeeding in NSW. PD2006\_012.

In Australia, we have a large number of women initiating breastfeeding. Very quickly, however, these rates decline rapidly until we have less than 20% of infants being fed any breastmilk at 6 months of age. The duration of breastfeeding is an area that needs urgent attention. Some strategies to address this include:

1. An intensive campaign (using various media forms) by the Australian Government to promote breastfeeding as the physiological **norm** for all infants.
2. Mandatory education for all health professionals who have contact with new mothers and babies. Early childhood staff, GP's and Paediatricians require education on the importance of breastfeeding for the health of the nation.
3. Medicare rebates for IBCLC's (International Board Certified Lactation Consultants) to provide equity and access for breastfeeding women requiring assistance with breastfeeding in a timely manner.
4. Establish Lactation Clinics in local areas, so women have clear lines of referral if they require specialised assistance to continue breastfeeding.
5. Support and promotion of the Australian Breastfeeding Association as the leading body in Australia providing peer support to breastfeeding mothers and babies. Financial support for this association to continue with all its wonderful initiatives and also the provision of a 1300 number to assist mothers to use this service.
6. Provision of a government funded strategy to support new mothers and babies managing in the home during the first two months after the birth of their baby. Many women are isolated

from their families at the time of childbearing and they need support and assistance during this vulnerable time.

7. Support and promotion of the BFHI (Baby Friendly Health Initiative) so that all maternity facilities will recognise the importance of achieving this global initiative to promote, support and protect breastfeeding.
8. Incentives for women to access midwifery services to ensure they have the continual support and assistance a known health professional during and after the birth of their baby. Medicare rebates for midwives would allow equity in the choice of a maternity carer. Midwives are also able to offer continued support for breastfeeding if they are providing care for the first 6 weeks after the baby's birth.
9. Initiate legislation to effectively uphold and monitor the WHO code of marketing breastmilk substitutes. This protects breastfeeding from marketing strategies of the manufacturers
10. Set up and manage a national human milk banking service within Australia to support the needs of infants. This can be attached to and run through the Neonatal Intensive Care Nurseries around Australia to help improve the health outcomes of all newborn infants.
11. Support the national adoption of the WHO growth charts designed specifically for breastfeeding babies. This will give parents clear realistic guidelines for their child's growth and decrease the need for giving additional supplements (usually of artificial baby milk) to achieve unrealistic and unhealthy goals.

We, as health professionals and as a community, do not unite over the issue of breastfeeding and this is where we need **leadership from the Australian Federal Government**. We need to send a strong message to all Australians that breastfeeding is vital to the survival of our species.

We would be happy to appear before the inquiry to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Yours sincerely

Monica Hogan IBCLC, Dale Hansson IBCLC, Louise Duursma IBCLC