



SUBMISSION TO THE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND AGEING

INQUIRY INTO THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF
BREASTFEEDING

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April 18, 2007 John Flynn Hospital Tugun Qld.

Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

Inquiry into the Health Benefits of Breastfeeding

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Local Government Councillor Byron Shire Council

April 18 2007 Tugun Qld.

Thank you for conducting this enquiry.

I believe it is vital to the future health and well being of Australians and the economic benefit of our nation to encourage, support and promote breastfeeding in our culture. I am sure the Standing Committee will receive definitive data from other submissions to verify my statement.

The benefits of breastfeeding to Australian infants, their mothers and families and the nation are beyond doubt. It is not the purpose of my submission to enter into any detail on this already proven truth.

I speak as an individual who has been involved in the science, promotion and encouragement of breastfeeding for more than three decades. I am a member of key breastfeeding organisations and have served some of them at national executive level. I support the submissions made by these organisations.

Australia has a good record of breastfeeding statistics, among the best in the Western world for initiation, but not duration. Less than half of our infants are breastfed at six months, and less than one fifth at twelve months. This suggests a need for ongoing support and education for Australian parents following the birth experience.

Breastfeeding rates among our Australian indigenous people are very poor. It is no coincidence that this correlates with their long term poor health and low life expectancy. The same appears to apply to some of our migrant populations, especially where English is not first language.

I wish to suggest practical ways forward, under the following headings:

1. Thallikool Aboriginal mothers education and support programs
2. Non-English speaking mothers education and support programs
3. Financial assistance for Breastfeeding Support Groups especially ABA
4. Recognition of the Lactation Consultant as a health profession in its own right.
5. Inclusion of professional lactation organisations such as IBLCE (International Board of Lactation Examiners) ALCA (the Australian Lactation Consultants' Association Ltd.) Colleges of Lactation, ILCA (the International Lactation Consultant Association) etc in future planning and initiatives for breastfeeding promotion and competency.
6. Day Stay Centres in the Northern Rivers Federal Government program funding. Refer to the Northern Rivers Family Care Centre P.O. Box 572 Lismore 2480. Evaluation of success of this program for wider application across Australia..
7. Funding for Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation for health facilities
8. Re-evaluation of the APMAIF program and its effectiveness as a voluntary industry monitor on the World Health Assembly International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes as adopted by the Australian Government.
9. Work in close relationship with the WHO/UNICEF breastfeeding initiatives.
10. NSW State Health Department Implementing the NSW Health Breastfeeding Policy across the State. This could be an appropriate strategy for other States and Territories.
11. e-Mothering Web sites. Funding for a help site for breastfeeding mothers.
12. Health Professionals Breastfeeding Competency requirements. This should become mandatory for health professionals employed to work with lactating women.

In this submission I would like to focus on two of the above subjects.

1. Thallikool Aboriginal mothers education and support programs, and
4. Recognition of the Lactation Consultant as a health profession in its own right.

As well, I would be happy to provide further information on any of the above.

**1. Thallikool Aboriginal mothers education and support programs
(Thallikool – Mother/Child Program)**

This initiative funded by Federal Government Employment Programs in South East Queensland and Northern NSW from 1989 to 1993 proved one of the most successful of the employment programs of the era. Aboriginal women were employed and trained as breastfeeding educators by Australian Breastfeeding Association (then called the Nursing Mothers' Association) personnel. About twenty people were involved over five programs, including a two year continuum on the NSW/Qld border. All the Aboriginal women went on to effective full time employment and education in various fields, as did the ABA educators who took part.

The Story of the Tweed Heads/Coolangatta Aboriginal Mothers Breastfeeding Support Group.

This was established as part of the Thallikool Program, and because of longer term funding, results were able to be evaluated over a more effective time frame, that is two years.

Four Aboriginal women were trained by two ABA educators. The Aboriginal women received certificates in breastfeeding education competency at the end of the program. The educators received status in their communities because they were paid at full rates for community educators. They knew exactly who to reach and where they were. They personally brought mothers and their babies and pregnancy women to regular meetings held at the Tweeds Heads Hospital Community Health Centre. The program was supported by the NSW Health and Queensland Health Departments and community health staff. At the beginning of the program, statistics showed twelve babies were born to Aboriginal mothers in each of the three years ie prior to the program during the program and at the end of the program. In the first year, no babies had been breastfed. In the second year during the beginning of the program, six babies were breast fed. In the third year, all the babies were breastfed, including triplets! Statistically, a 100% improvement.

4. Recognition of the Lactation Consultant as a health profession in its own right.

The Lactation Consultant is a new profession, with international qualifications and ongoing re certifying requirements being maintained since 1987. Health Departments recognise the lactation consultant only in addition to another qualification eg midwife, doctor etc. It is time a School of Lactation was established in Australia, working with the IBLCE (International Board of Lactation Examiners). This School would provide curriculum standards for professional competency as a stand alone profession to be employed for the purpose of establishing and assisting women who are lactation in hospital and long term.