



Inquiry into Breastfeeding  
Standing Committee on Health & Ageing  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
PO BOX 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

15-2-07

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you as a mother who is truly shocked and confused at the current state of breastfeeding issues. Our society undermines the value of breastmilk and this is a serious problem – for our future health, economy and sustainability.

It is past due time that our government takes serious action toward improving the nations breastfeeding rates and awareness.

I am a young mother of three small children. When I gave birth to my first child, at the age of 19 (4 years ago), I breastfed because I believed there was no other choice. (Even when I faced the uphill battle of him being born 8 weeks premature and too young to suck.) Since then I have discovered that I am among a very small majority of women who feel this way about how babies should be fed.

Could you imagine a world where formula was only used for what it was intended – an emergency nutrition substitute. But instead, our world is tainted with images of bottle-fed babies and endless media & advertising of formula brands. – Formula brands stating “GOLD” or “added DHA” – what does this mean? My sister-in-law once told me that she chose ‘such n such’ brand because it had “added iron and DHA”! I wondered if she would ever really know the ingredients of that powdered artificial stuff she was feeding her baby.

Breastmilk is so unfairly undervalued, and it’s no wonder. Most new mothers have never seen a baby feeding at the breast. And when they do get to that stage where they actually have to think about it – during pregnancy – they are surrounded by formula adverts, bottles, teats, and dummies in the supermarket aisle, formula sachets in the doctors and child health clinics, and most of all, their own mothers and peers who have all bottle-fed before them. And so the viscous cycle continues.

Mothers see breastfeeding as ‘good if they can do it’, yet some choose to not even try. For those that do try, what goes wrong? Perhaps it’s due to all the inaccurate information out there. It seems to me that no-one knows a thing about breastfeeding management. Many mothers I know have visited a GP for help with breastfeeding, only to be given poor advice, resulting in unnecessary use of formula and weaning. From personal experience, I witnessed a GP in utter shock and disapproval of me feeding my 12 month old while pregnant. Lucky for me, I believed firmly in the WHO recommendations of breastfeeding for at least 2 years. Her opinions and inaccurate information may cause many other mums to doubt their own breastfeeding choices.

Some of the many cases of poor health professional advice range from

- “inadequate milk supply or quality”
- “unsafe to breastfeed if taking medication”
- “baby not gaining sufficient weight”

Of the latter advice, it is to my disappointment in the health system for not implementing the new World Health Organization’s Growth Charts. It was about time that breastfed babies were not compared on a graph designed from American formula-fed infants. However, now that the new charts have been released, it is extremely pointless if the charts are not being used in the Child Health Record Book that all new parents get after leaving hospital. As a result of these misinforming charts, yet again the use of formula is often unnecessarily used if a fully breastfed baby is not following the ‘percentile’ – which obviously it will not!

Formula companies need to stop striving for big bucks and start being forced to think about the health of our poor defenseless babies who are the real victims to their mothers' poor choices.

These poor choices are made, even when the mother 'knows' 'breast is best'. Very few of them have any idea that this actually means that babies who are fed infant formula are sicker and that there are serious health risks associated with even a single early exposure to infant formula.

The MAIF Agreement is clearly not working. There is such an aggressive marketing for toddler formula, giving mothers the false impression that it is some sort of health food and aids brain development. The same goes for bottles and teats that claim to be "close to breastfeeding" or "anti-colic", making them more appealing.

The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative is a positive step in the right direction. Hospitals that pride themselves on believing breast is the most important. Yet, we still hear of hospitals giving formula to babies – this is not acceptable unless it's 'medically necessary'. And when is it 'medically necessary'? When a baby loses more weight than its 'allowed' to!? – How about encouraging and helping a mother to increase the number of breastfeeds instead?

After having a baby only 7 months ago, I can honestly say our public hospital system is utterly disgraceful! Mothers being sent home within 24hrs after giving birth leaves them with little chance of successfully breastfeeding. It astounds me that mothers will be sent home as soon as possible to save space, time, and money. Yet our health system spends more than \$5 BILLION a year on the 5 common childhood illnesses (such as gastroenteritis, ear infection, etc) – all of which are prevented by exclusive breastfeeding! This isn't to mention the MILLIONS of \$\$ going into health campaigns on awareness of obesity, asthma, SIDS, and diabetes – all of which are greatly reduced by exclusive breastfeeding!

We need to get back to the foundations of our future health – Breastfeed Babies!

How can we make a difference?

- 1- Educate Health Professionals. As recommended by the World Health Organization, the government should be responsible for providing education on infant feeding.
- 2- Public Health Campaign. If our society believes and follows the media, then advertise breastfeeding! And we need to target people other than mothers (friends relatives, employers) – changing attitudes is the first step in making the sight of a breastfeeding woman in public as normal as someone walking a dog! A campaign should also focus on the risks of NOT breastfeeding rather than the benefits.
- 3- Funding for Breastfeeding Support. The government needs to spend more than the \$100,000pa to support the Australian Breastfeeding Associations 2000 volunteer community health workers. The ABA is the authority on breastfeeding information and support, but need more support from the government to continue their amazing work. Research has also shown that a mother who joins the ABA is 10 times more likely to breastfeed, and for longer. So we need to support a good thing while it's there.
- 4- Funding and Establishing Human Milk Banks. Imagine human milk donations being similar to blood donations. Wider access to breastmilk would prevent premature babies from dying or becoming seriously ill, as well as other infants being exposed to formula if their mothers were unable to provide their milk. We must stop thinking of this as unethical or such, and think about the breastmilk as a resource. A resource that can save lives.
- 5- Legislation against Unethical Marketing of Infant Formula. Whatever it takes to enforce the law and to make formula the emergency supplement rather than the 'other option'. Ban the use of formula in all hospitals. Or more wide-spread, ban the use of formula in public places.

I truly hope the government takes a hard look at this health epidemic. With the right moves, strategies and decisions, we could increase breastfeeding rates and increase the health of the nation.

Yours truly,

Pascal Donovan  
Mother of Three Breastfed Babies  
Victoria