

I have just learned of the House of Representatives inquiry into breastfeeding and although I have never done anything along these lines before, I thought I would take a few minutes to write.

I was a breastfed child and grew up seeing my mother breastfeed my siblings. In my home it was the normal thing to do. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many families, especially beyond six months. The perception among many of my friends and extended family is that artificial baby milk is an acceptable substitute that has similar properties to mother's milk. I believe the aggressive marketing of toddler milk and the way babies are portrayed in television shows does not help this perception. I also believe that many care providers are simply not informed as much as they could be about the health risks of not breastfeeding.

Like many other new mothers, I had challenges in the early days establishing a breastfeeding relationship with my first child. After a very confusing stay in hospital feeling bombarded by many differing opinions, I sought the help of a private Lactation Consultant. While I believe the consultation fee was worth every cent, I feel that Medicare should cover the services of Lactation Consultants, at least in part.

I have called The Australian Breastfeeding Association's helpline several times. The support from these busy mothers donating their time has been a Godsend. I feel for women who are not within major centres who would have to incur the price of STD phone calls when contacting the association. Government funding could perhaps see a freecall number set up to ease the burden.

Mothers Milk Banks are another thing I feel passionate about. It would be wonderful to see more Milk Banks set up and funding for those already in existence like the one at John Flynn hospital in Tugun for children who can't have their own mothers milk.

Most of all, I would love it if the general public understood that mothers milk is the normal food for our young and the health risks associated with not breastfeeding for both baby and mother. I have lost count of the criticism I have faced over the last few years from people within my social circle, extended family, total strangers and even by health care professionals for doing the normal thing; full term breastfeeding my children. The questions about weaning began when my little girl was nine months and continued as I breastfed her throughout my second pregnancy and after the birth of my second daughter.

Thank-you to the House of Representatives for conducting this inquiry. I do hope that there are some positive steps taken to increase the amount of babies and children having the right food for them.

Regards,  
L Beyer