

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/haa/breastfeeding>

To the Secretary of the Committee on Health and Aging:

My focus in this submission is mainly on possible initiatives to be taken by the government to promote and increase successful breastfeeding among Australian Women. Over the course of my pregnancy I examined evidence available to me, both scientific research and personal observation, and came to the conclusion that infants who are breastfed for the first one to three years of their life are healthier and happier than those who are formula fed. During my exploration I also discovered that there is a lot of misconception and mythology surrounding breastfeeding and that it is a subject on almost every woman has an opinion or personal story.

The health benefits of breast-feeding are supposedly well known, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation have several studies and reports on their websites which demonstrate the positive effects breastfeeding can have for both **mothers** and **infants**, but a negative attitude towards breast-feeding in our culture persists, and despite the minimum one year recommended breast feeding by the Australian, British and US healthcare organisations, there is still a plethora of misinformation given to women who are pregnant or breastfeeding which can cause failure in the implementation of successful breastfeeding. This misinformation comes from both professional and personal spheres.

There is also a culture of denial, women who choose formula over breast milk say that they should not be "made to feel guilty" by those who promote breastfeeding. I would like to point out that if a woman is *not* able to breastfeed then she should not feel guilty as there are psychological or physical factors inhibiting it, and if women have made the *choice* to formula feed then they must make it with the knowledge of the fact that breastfeeding *does* help in the prevention of many ailments. Breast milk is the best food for babies whether or not they feel comfortable with the idea.

I am an Australian woman currently breastfeeding my first child and living in the UK, which while it has its own issues to address regarding breastfeeding, seems to be putting positive structures in place to promote and encourage breastfeeding, for at *least* the first year of babies' lives.

These initiatives include:

- Midwife visits at least every 2 days from the birth of an infant until it is a fortnight old which are replaced by
- Weekly visits from a trained Health Visitor until the infant is at least 6 weeks old
- Accessible drop-in clinics for breast-feeding mothers with trained lactation consultants
- In my area a "café" (based in a church hall) for mothers to gather and practice breast-feeding in public and gain peer support, as well as extra support from lactation consultants and health visitors
- 9 months' statutory paid maternity leave, which means the recommended 6months of exclusive breast-feeding is a realistic aim.

The above initiatives have all been helpful for me in the establishment and maintenance of breast-feeding my child.

It is important for women to have breastfeeding information available to them in a way in which they feel comfortable, advice needs to come from peers, as well as professionals, training needs to be provided for women from all backgrounds to become breastfeeding support counsellors.

Early intervention is also an important issue, many young women in today's society do not interact with infants and young children on a regular basis and many have not even held a new baby until their own is placed into their arms, let alone spent time observing another woman breastfeeding and getting to see how it is done. Young girls and women (and boys and men) need to see breastfeeding in action, and see it as a "normal" thing for mothers to do. Breastfeeding should be welcomed into the public sphere. Many schools now teach sex education, breastfeeding and its advantages should also be a part of the curriculum.

Formula companies have the money for marketing, to sell their product to new mothers, but breastfeeding only makes silent profits, and does not pay for shiny advertising, it requires the Government to provide sponsorship and promotion for it. A campaign to dispel the myths of breastfeeding is needed.

There should also be more money made available for research into the benefits of breastfeeding for the environment, as well as infant and maternal health.

These are the initiatives I would recommend, thank you for your time.

http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/exclusive_breastfeeding/en/index.html