

Ms Julie Hayes

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a breastfeeding mother of two young girls. I have a two-and-a-half year old that I fed until she reached 18 months, and a four-month old who is still exclusively breastfed. Before my first daughter was born I hadn't given breastfeeding much thought, as I wrongly assumed that it would just happen and that a woman shouldn't need assistance to do something that seems so natural. I was shocked to discover just how much support, knowledge and assistance I needed to make breastfeeding 'happen'. I was lucky and had no serious difficulties, but have seen so many of my friends give up or wean early because of poor, insufficient and even conflicting advice. Below are a couple of suggestions for how I think the Australian Government could help to encourage breastfeeding in our community:

Financial support for the Australian Breastfeeding Association. I am a relative newcomer to the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA). I see there a huge untapped resource that could be available to the Australian Government, in the form of extensively trained breastfeeding counsellors. These counsellors are all women who have breastfed themselves, and who work voluntarily from their own homes to provide support and information to mums through telephone hotlines. For more than forty years, ABA (previously the Nursing Mothers Association of Australia) counsellors have assisted a great many mothers in need of advice or support. However, currently there is a different telephone 'hotline' for each state. Some of them involve telephoning several numbers before the mother seeking help can talk to a counsellor, and some of them do not operate 24 hours a day. Government support for this style of counselling would assist ABA to establish a nation-wide telephone hotline, to train more counsellors, and to promote the service more widely in the community.

Promotion of exclusive and extended breastfeeding. The Australian Government should consider doing more to promote awareness in the general community of the importance of human milk for infants. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, followed by continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond. However, most of my friends who are also young mums are not even aware of these guidelines. I'd like to see greater acceptance of breastfeeding in our wider society. I am not someone who worries overly about what other people think of my beliefs, but even I began to feel uncomfortable about breastfeeding my toddler in public. I don't think I should have felt that way. Widespread promotion (television commercials, newspaper and magazine advertisements, publication of brochures and posters etc.) of exclusive and extended breastfeeding would help to establish these practices as normal and would encourage more mums to persist with breastfeeding.

My sincere thanks for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry,

Julie Hayes

Mother of two

Community Educator for the Mt Lofty Group of the Australian Breastfeeding Association