

Parliamentary Inquiry into Obesity.  
Submission by Susanna Scurry.

Dear Sir,

JS 14/05/08

I wish to make a submission into the Obesity Inquiry.

In the Hunter Area we have the worst statistics in the state of NSW regarding obesity. Along with that we are on a par with Western Sydney with life expectancy outcomes. In the recent Population and Health Study into Breastfeeding 2003-2004 the Hunter had the worst breastfeeding statistics in the State.

The evidence is very clear that breastfeeding and obesity are linked however in our area the obesity funded group left us out of their work and concentrated on the school lunch box. Breastfed infants are less prone to obesity and the mothers who breastfeed loose the weight they put on in pregnancy, the longer they feed the more weight they loose.

The Parliamentary inquiry into breastfeeding last year looked at the benefits of breastfeeding however the recommendations of that inquiry have not been addressed.

The John Hunter Hospital became Baby Friendly Health Accredited 2 years ago and as part of the efforts to protect, promote and support breastfeeding a breastfeeding clinic was opened. The anecdotal evidence told us that with mothers and babies being discharged from hospital early and with initiation rates of around 97% women wanted to breastfeed but gave up through lack of support.

We have seen over 700 women in 2 years and had to increase our service from 3 half days a week to 5 days a week.

The bulk of the women we have seen have babies between 7-14 days and a recent survey showed us that most of the women we have seen are still breastfeeding. They were very positive about the clinic but wanted more services in the community, i.e. lactation visits at home, rebates for lactation services, etcetera.

The evidence also shows that women of lower socioeconomic groups, less than tertiary educated, less than 25 years of age tend to formula feed, with the resulting obesity and poor health outcomes for themselves and their children. We need community education into the benefits of breastfeeding that target this group.

Infant formula companies and baby food makers continue to undermine breastfeeding by sponsorship to medical conferences and advertizing. Breastfeeding with no resources is not on a level playing field. The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding until six months of age and then breastmilk with appropriate complimentary food till two years or more. Australia falls well short of these recommendations and without proper supervision of the marketing of infant food and resources put into raising the community's awareness of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and when the introduction of solids is appropriate, breasts will still be seen sexually and gawked at on the footy field or used for marketing.

Newcastle is a very working class blocky town and it takes courage to breastfeed especially an older baby in public. Promotion of breastfeeding and what is optimum would support these women.

If obesity is to be addressed adequately getting it right from the beginning is a healthy beginning!

Susanna Scurry