

Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into Obesity in Australia

Submission from

Tasmanian Breastfeeding Coalition^a

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COMMENTS ON TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The Committee will inquire into and report on the increasing prevalence of obesity in the Australian population, focusing on future implications for Australia's health system.

Obesity rates in Australia have been growing at an alarming rate, which is contributing to pressures on the health system as a result of associated increases in diet related disease (Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and certain types of cancers).

Because of a growing body of evidence showing an inverse relationship between breastfeeding and subsequent risk of overweight/obesity, this enquiry should also consider the less than desirable rates of breastfeeding and the link between the two issues.

^aThe Tasmanian Breastfeeding Coalition is made up of a number of groups and organisations which work together to improve breastfeeding rates in Tasmania. Initially formed in 1996 the Coalition now extends across the state of Tasmania.

Currently the following are members of our Coalition:

- Australian Breastfeeding Association
- Australian College of Midwives Inc. Tas Branch
- Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, Tas Committee
- Calvary HealthCare Hospitals
 - St Lukes Campus
 - Lenah Valley Campus
- Child Health Association Tasmania Inc
- Department of Health and Human Services
 - Beaconsfield District Health Service
 - Community Nutrition Unit, Population Health
 - Child, Health and Parenting Service
 - Maternity Services, Royal Hobart Hospital
 - Maternity Services Launceston General Hospital
 - Oral Health Services
 - Nutrition and Dietetics, Royal Hobart Hospital
- Healthscope
 - Hobart Private Hospital, Maternity Services
 - St Helens Private Hospital
- Birth Centre, Launceston
- National Association of Childbirth Educators
- Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (Tasmanian Branch)
- Tasmanian Lactation College Inc.
- Diabetes Australia – Tasmania
- Glenorchy City Council
- Eat Well Tasmania
- Good Beginnings Australia
- Women Tasmania
- Tasmanian Early Years Foundation
- Health Care
 - North West Private Hospital

2. The Committee will recommend what governments, industry, individuals and the broader community can do to prevent and manage the obesity epidemic in children, youth and adults.

There is a strong body of evidence showing that breastfeeding has a protective effect against obesity in children. This effect is independent of other determinants such as socioeconomic factors, race and parental education.^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10}

A national ongoing effort to increase breastfeeding duration, supported by effective monitoring of breastfeeding rates, could have a significant impact on reducing obesity rates well into the future and should be incorporated in any comprehensive obesity prevention strategy. The Australian Breastfeeding Association's *Breastfeeding Leadership Plan* provides the basis for a nation strategy. Recommendations from *The Best Start* report on the inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding also provide clear actions to promote and support breastfeeding in Australia.

Development of a national human milk and lactation research capacity that aims to generate evidence regarding human milk and breastfeeding are critical in managing and informing public and primary health care prevention strategies to manage the epidemic of childhood, youth and adult obesity.

Signed:

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