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I am making this Submission to the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding as a mother of four children, three of whom were breastfed babies and as a voluntary breastfeeding counsellor since 1985 with the Australian Breastfeeding Association (previously known as the Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia). I have not only enjoyed the many benefits of breastfeeding my own children, one of whom was stillborn at 38 weeks gestation, but of passing on knowledge of the benefits to the thousands of women I have counselled over the years. From my own point of view one of the most important reasons the Australian government needs to assist in meeting the needs of breastfeeding women is the considerable mental health impacts of women not achieving their perceived goals in childbearing and breastfeeding. This important but short time in a woman's life is forever etched into her consciousness and carries considerable long term impacts for the woman in the way she copes in the rest of her life. I have observed deep grief and sadness in women who have either not had the type of birth experience they had hoped for or the type of breastfeeding experience they had hoped for. For women birth and breastfeeding often define them as women. These are not experiences they take lightly as evidenced by the considerable planning and thought which women invest in their plans for birthing and breastfeeding of their infants. I would like women to be assisted by being able to access the type of information they need pre-birth to maximize their chances of success in having the type of breastfeeding experience they hope and long for.

Often after the birth women are given conflicting advice and information. This is a time when women are like 'a sponge' ready to listen to and take on board any information offered to them. If this information is conflicting they experience profound confusion about the right way to proceed in their mothering and breastfeeding of their babies. The "Breastfeeding Friendly Hospital Initiative" has gone a long way to reducing this confusion but there is still a lot of work to be done in making sure women are given consistent informed and correct advice at this vulnerable period of their lives.

Another factor which I have found is impacting on women's breastfeeding experience in the current breastfeeding environment is the fact that women are being told they need to 'train' their babies to sleep. This goes against all babies natural sleep, wake, feeding rhythms which may be very different from one baby to another. All young mammals feed very frequently, and this ensures a good supply of breastmilk in the mother of the young. Babies are not different, as when as they are newborn and while breastfeeding is being established, babies need very frequent feeding as the triggers to breastmilk supply

are the frequency of nipple stimulation (which triggers the release of the appropriate hormones in the mother) and the emptying of the breasts themselves. Babies do not understand sleep training and methods such as 'controlled crying' but only know that their mother is not responding to their cries, and research shows that as crying is one of their main form of communication, if this stimulus to the mother to act is not responded to it will eventually extinguish. In my own experience I have observed that breastfed babies fed according to need very rarely cry, and if they do for a very short time, as their needs are instantly responded to in an appropriate way, that is they are breastfed by their mother. Breastfeeding is not only about getting food into a baby. It is a package of nurture, care, food, comfort, love, response which is of considerable immeasurable importance for both the mother and the infant for the rest of their lives.

Some of ways we could improve breastfeeding rates in this country are:

- Extensive media advertising of the benefits to mother and baby of breastfeeding, especially television advertisements
- Lactation leave and lactation breaks written into industrial awards for breastfeeding mothers
- Including the need to breastfeed babies in all dietary guidelines
- Support for Mothers Milk Banks so that those babies who cannot access their own mother's milk can still be fed on breastmilk
- Programs to inform partners of pregnant women of the importance of breastfeeding (research has shown that a supportive partner can be one of the most important factors in whether a mother succeeds in her wish to breastfeed her baby)
- Targeting young women and men at High School level to inform them of the considerable benefits of breastfeeding and the risks of giving artificial milks to babies
- Employing Lactation Consultants in all hospitals
- Severe penalties for any breaches of the Marketing of Infant Formula agreement
- Government support for the Australian Breastfeeding Association

Breastfeeding of babies is one of the critical strategies for improving the health of Australia's citizens. I will continue in my own life to work on a daily basis, as I have done for the past 27 years, to improve breastfeeding rates and the duration of breastfeeding in this country. I am heartened by the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding which hopefully will lead to positive breastfeeding outcomes for many more women in this country.

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