

House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Health and Aging  
Enquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding

I would like to offer a personal viewpoint from a mother who has 3 breastfed babies, now ranging in age from 18-27 years. I have also been a counsellor with the Australian Breastfeeding Association for 20 years and have spoken to numerous women about breastfeeding.

We know that mothers want to breastfeed. Most women in Australia start out doing so, but many prematurely wean, certainly before the recommendations of the NHMRC or the World Health Organization. Current strategies and thinking need to look at ways of helping mothers to continue breastfeeding and governments have a role to play in this, not just set targets.

In my twenty years as a counsellor, I have heard the same stories from mothers – poor advice from many health professionals, pressure from family/friends to wean or start solids early, concerns about breastfeeding in public, unrealistic expectations about baby behaviour, lack of support for parenting choices, including co-sleeping, and so on. I have also seen mothers enjoy and continue breastfeeding when they are in a breast-feeding culture, such as involvement with the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

1. Breastfeeding is a health issue, not a lifestyle one.
  - Health care money can be saved by increasing the duration of breastfeeding as even in a developed country like Australia, there are significant health risks for babies not breastfed.
  - Social campaigns need to be aimed at the rest of the community, so that mothers are not bombarded with well meaning advice from family/friends that is outdated.
2. Government to focus on accepting the WHO Code in its entirety
  - Breastfeeding advocates do not have the resources to counter the promotion by artificial baby milk companies
  - The APMAIF agreement needs to be extended to include a retailers code and toddler formulas.
3. Change labelling on baby food to reflect the NHMRC guidelines of exclusive breastfeeding to 6 months.
  - Labels saying baby foods are suitable for babies at 4 months need to be changed, as parents will often use the labelling for guidance.
4. Put in place policies that will support mothers, such as:
  - Paid maternity leave
  - Use of new WHO growth chart that are based on breast-fed infants
  - Ensure all health professionals are educated about breastfeeding

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