

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Re: Parliamentary Committee Inquiry - Inquiry into Breastfeeding

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Terms of Reference:

a. the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding;

The health importance of breastfeeding is well researched and reported. I do believe however we need to ensure that breastmilk and non-breastmilk are not evaluated so flippantly by parents. The health dangers of formula use (even just one bottle) are extremely well evidenced too and I believe our health authorities and health professionals have a huge responsibility to help us as parents to make informed decisions – to not to let us blindly accept that if breastfeeding doesn't happen or if we would rather not for one reason or another that formula is an equal or almost equal alternative. Parents need to be told the dangers of not breastfeeding.

b. evaluate the impact of marketing of breast milk substitutes on breastfeeding rates and, in particular, in disadvantaged, Indigenous and remote communities;

I'm very glad in Australia that we do have better control of this situation than other countries – eg America but we could do so much better. We have MAIF agreement however this is being very cleverly avoided by manufacturers – samples are still being handed to mothers who are breastfeeding (in pharmacies, in child health centres in hospitals, in doctor's surgeries), manufacturers are still using clever marketing techniques that undermine breastfeeding (eg using a paediatrician to discuss toddler formula – no toddler needs formula!!), slipping in the back door with incentives such as conference sponsorship; retailers do not have to comply with the MAIF so more and more advertising is happening at retail level.

I have no experience of the influence in remote and indigenous communities – I shudder to think!!!!

We need the full WHO code implemented and upheld by our government policies. Any alternative is second best.

c. the potential short and long term impact on the health of Australians of increasing the rate of breastfeeding;

Less greenhouse gasses from the cows! with the multitude of flow on effects for health; less spending on health – less early sickness in babies/children; less carer leave for workers (when their children are sick – and mothers who breastfeed are healthier too); research is very comprehensive in the long term health impact of breastfeeding vs formula feeding –

asthma, diabetes, cancers, gut disorders such as Crohn's and Coeliac disease, allergies, etc, etc.

d. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding;

Implement the WHO code fully.

Increase funding dramatically to IBCLCs within hospitals and community.

Immediate significant funding to Australian Breastfeeding Association incentives, eg. toll free helpline, television advertising campaigns, breastfeeding education classes, audio visual, etc.

Medicare rebates for ABA subscription.

Medicare rebates for Lactation Consultant visits and Electric Breastpump Hire.

Tie some of the Baby Bonus to breastfeeding at 6 or 12 months of age.

Infant formula only on prescription and after medical advice of a doctor.

Significant updating of Midwives, GPs and Paediatricians in the area of new breastfeeding knowledge. Mothers complain regularly of the contradiction in information and suggestions/treatment and as a breastfeeding counsellor I regularly find what mothers are being told is inaccurate or they have not had treatment explained. Litigation is headed our way if we do not improve this situation in Australia.

e. examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding; and

All I can say to this one is that there is a huge band of Lactation Consultants, other health professionals and ABA volunteers trying very hard but it is very hit and miss – lack of funding and support mean it can not be a comprehensive strategy. There is already a policy but it seems to have been forgotten by our government.

f. the impact of breastfeeding on the long term sustainability of Australia's health system."

This is the very big picture – it will be very difficult to establish that the big health issue of obesity, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, hypertension are as a direct result of babies not being breastfed or not being breastfed for a particular time. Logic does however tell us that research evidence that formula (even one bottle) does harm must lead to the conclusion that some of Australia's long term health issues could be reduced by a higher initiation rate and a longer mean duration of breastfeeding. In my opinion Australia's health system is in crisis already and any strategy that will alleviate even some of the stress at any level is vital for the system's health.

Personal Experience:

I am the mother of 2 boys aged 10 ½ and 7 years. I am 43 years old. I am a qualified secondary teacher and have a Bachelor of Education.

I had no role models for breastfeeding within a large family – my own mother sees herself as failing breastfeeding and I have no knowledge of my aunts breastfeeding at all. I have plenty of recollections of children of the family and friends having bottles (formula and other nasty stuff!!) and dummies – often into toddlerhood. I have no sisters. My only experiences of

breastfeeding during my childhood and teen years in a country community were an "alternative" neighbour who breastfed both her children and a "weird" woman who attended the same golf club as my parents who had breastfed her child to at least talking age. This was evidenced by him calling out loudly and repeatedly "boobie" in the golf club which was seen to be disgraceful by all in attendance and the mother rushed from the room very upset.

Obviously, having been raised on a farm with plenty of animals I knew that animals suckled their young. Unfortunately I had no human role models and I guess that lesson in nature never rubbed off on me – that mothers carry their foetus in the womb and nourish it and so the "natural" nurturing and nourishment continues after the birth through breastfeeding.

We left the farm for the city when I was 16 years, completed my TEE and went to University and become a teacher. Once out in the workforce I had the opportunity to teach Early Childhood Studies and Childcare as a Home Economics teacher and was introduced to this debate ie bottle (formula) vs breast as part of the curriculum. Looking back now it is disappointing that bottle (formula) vs breastfeeding was considered only on a very superficial level – eg cost, convenience, bonding, etc.

With luck someone gave me the details of a local Nursing Mothers Association group who were prepared to visit classes with a breastfed baby and talk to the students about the importance of breastfeeding – little did they know I was one of those "students", learning much more about breastfeeding than most of my students. This made a huge impression on me personally – the realisation hit me that babies are supposed to be breastfed – that's what breasts are really for!!!!

As the years went on, I married and we became pregnant with our first child I realised I would need to make the decision to breastfeed or bottle (formula) feed. I chose to "have a go at" breastfeeding. I knew if it didn't work out that bottle "would be an Ok alternative" – I had been told that by all and sundry – everyone I mixed with had that opinion. I did read quite a bit, I joined the then Nursing Mothers Association but did not attend meetings until our baby was around 6 weeks old. Our one antenatal class that covered breastfeeding in about ½ hour in a private hospital was a waste of time, when I now look back – nothing at all helpful was passed on to us.

My experience after the birth of the baby was that everyone gave me the feedback that my baby was feeding perfectly his attachment was beautiful – well why in jeebies was it feeling like he had razor blades in his mouth? I was made to feel like a criminal when I refused to allow my baby to be given formula as he was supposedly dehydrated and showing urates in his urine. I am very glad I had insisted on waiting to see my GP/OBS as she reassured me the best thing to do was continue to feed, feed and feed so my milk would come in – it did on day 5 and all was well. I am suspicious that he may have received formula without my consent and am very glad it is part of hospital protocol to have parent permission. See notes within my submission. I left the hospital with no support at all except 2 midwifery visits and my child health nurse to visit within the first 2 weeks. How on this earth I continued is beyond me now to explain – I had extremely sore nipples for the first 10 weeks, a baby that fed almost 24 hours a day and cried any other time he wasn't feeding. How on earth I didn't end up severely depressed I can't explain.

The first time I got accurate breastfeeding help was when I spoke to my local nursing Mothers counsellor and started attending meetings. Everything looked up from there. I got the support I needed and the accurate information and helpful suggestion in a friendly non-judgemental forum. My first son continued breastfeeding until 3 years when I had fallen pregnant with our 2nd child and he breastfed beautifully until around 5 years.

My husband's mother did not breastfeed any of her 7 children however two of my sister-in-laws breastfed their children at the most to one year. It was never very accepted, hushed up and kept private. It was never discussed by either of them with me until I began my volunteer work with Nursing Mothers.

I became a community educator with Nursing Mothers in 1996 when my first son was only 4 months old and was delighted to be able to start educating some of the students studying Early Childhood Studies and Childcare in my local area. I qualified as a breastfeeding counsellor in 1999 and still am very active in my local group and branch even though my boys weaned long ago.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this Parliamentary Inquiry.

Sincerely
Del smith