

28th February 2007

Submission to:
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
House of Representatives
Parliament House

Re: Inquiry into Breastfeeding

There are several major initiatives needed at the national level to ensure that Australian mothers are appropriately supported for optimum breastfeeding, and ultimately, health and economic outcomes. These initiatives include, but go well beyond, the items currently listed in the Terms of Reference of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding. The detailed rationale for the initiatives outlined below is contained in a special edition of the NSW Public Health Bulletin: "Breastfeeding and the Public's Health – Volume 16(4), March-April 2005" (attached – also at: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/phb/HTML2005/marchapril05html/contentsjmarchapril05.html>) and in the more recent background paper prepared by the Women's Health Special Interest Group of the Public Health Association of Australia as a basis for revision of the PHAA Breastfeeding Policy (a copy of this Background Paper will be forthcoming in a separate submission).

Imperatives for the Commonwealth Government include:

1. Establishment of a **national peak body** to coordinate and oversee implementation of a strategic approach to breastfeeding promotion, protection and support and breastfeeding research in Australia.
2. Establishment of **State-level coalitions**, under the coordination of the national body, to oversee efforts at the local level.
3. Achievement of consensus on definitions, indicators and methods for **monitoring breastfeeding**, consistency in monitoring methods, and dedication of funds to ensure ongoing, comparable statistics on trends in breastfeeding practices in Australia.
4. Provision of dedicated, ongoing funding for **breastfeeding research** in Australia, particularly for evaluation research on the effect of interventions (including social and environmental interventions) to encourage and support breastfeeding.
5. National support for the routine implementation and monitoring of the **Baby Friendly Health Initiatives** in maternity, community health service and paediatric services across Australia.
6. Inclusion of **breastfeeding education** in under-graduate and post-graduate courses for health professionals who deal with mothers and infants.
7. Translation of the **World Health Organization Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes** (and subsequent resolutions) (the WHO Code) into national legislation and regulations and ongoing implementation and monitoring in both commercial and health service environments.
8. Provision of **national legislative support** for breastfeeding including the adoption of paid maternity leave to at least six months, and preferably 12 months and mandating that employers provide flexible work practices, work breaks and facilities to allow employees to combine breastfeeding and work.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry. We look forward to the forthcoming deliberations and report.

Yours sincerely,
Beth Stickney and Andy Bravo (Public Health Nutritionists)