

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
Inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding

As an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant in private practice and librarian with extensive experience in education and private libraries, I respectfully submit the following.

a. the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding;

There has been much research into the health benefits of breastfeeding throughout the world. The World Health Organization has conducted research and published recommendations that babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of their lives with a gradual introduction of family foods while continuing to breastfeed for two years and beyond.¹ The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council also recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life.²

Research has now been conducted into the economic benefits to the family unit and the government authorities through reduced incidence of ill health that requires medical and/or hospitalization. While not completely eliminating sickness, the cost reduction is significant to the economy.³

Therefore, this inquiry should:

- ▶ increase support and education for breastfeeding throughout the community:
 - in educational settings (primary and secondary)
 - in antenatal health care
 - in training courses for health care providers, nurses, midwives, child health nurses, general practitioners, obstetricians, and pharmacists

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

The commercial production and sales of any product is for the benefit of that manufacturer. The marketing of breast milk substitutes relies on incorrect and often misleading advertising. Artificial Formulas are known to cause ill health and many brands have had to recall their product due to faults in manufacturing the product.

Therefore, this inquiry should:

- ▶ Replace the MAIF Agreement with full recognition and support of the WHO International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes. (The Code)
- ▶ Provide adequate and appropriate funding to monitor and police the Code
- ▶ Provide adequate and appropriate funding to all related government health and human services departments to ensure that employees know of The Code and support The Code in full
- ▶ Regulate the advertising of toddler and follow-on formulas to include information about the potential for obesity if toddlers and children are not encouraged to eat a normal solid food diet.

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

This area of the inquiry encompasses part A of the inquiry. Further longitudinal research should be funded into benefits of breastfeeding and the harms of using breastmilk substitutes. A global review that would provide background information has been funded by the Pan American Health Organization. ⁴

- ▶ This inquiry should ensure that there is adequate research funding for short term and long term studies into health benefits of breastfeeding.

d. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding;

Breastfeeding advocates, both in the health profession and the volunteer health area work to provide accurate and comprehensive information for women and their families to make an informed choice about breastfeeding. This is done with limited funding.

Therefore, this inquiry should:

- ▶ Prohibit the sponsorship of health professional education, eg seminars, conferences and print materials by manufacturers and commercial marketers of artificial baby and follow-on formulas, even if the companies are involved in other areas of health such as immunisations.
- ▶ Ensure that all training programs for health professionals includes detailed information about breastfeeding as the normal method to feed babies and young toddlers.
- ▶ Promote breastfeeding as the normal manner to feed babies through advertising campaigns in all areas of the media
- ▶ Provide Medicare and private Health Care Fun rebates for the use of International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs)
- ▶ Provide early and quality assistance for mothers of new babies to help them breastfeed
- ▶ Provide funding support for the volunteer association (The Australian Breastfeeding Association) to help them support within the community through education, research and peer support and reach-out programs.

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

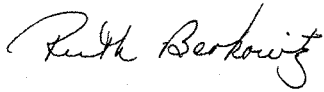
Many statistics are gathered through state health and human service government providers as well as the Australian Breastfeeding Association. There needs to be national co-ordination of this data. Currently the data ranges over a number of areas without a cohesive or systematic procedure for ensuring that data is able to be used to improve breastfeeding rates to meet the government target for 2010.

This inquiry should:

- ▶ Provide for national and state co-ordinators to
 - implement measures to promote and encourage breastfeeding
 - research appropriate methods to reach the diverse populations of the states and territories
 - provide funding to implement educational programs for the diverse groups including CALD, socio-economic disadvantaged, and young teen mothers.

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

Breastfeeding reduces the incidences of serious illnesses.^{1,2,4} By reducing serious illness and the need to have hospital stays and visit doctors, breastfeeding will reduce the cost of the health system to the tax payer. This can allow monies to be moved into further education on the normality of breastfeeding and the benefits to the baby, mother and family. Further strategies can then be researched concerning length of time breastfeeding, materials for antenatal and postnatal care and Baby Friendly Health Initiatives.



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1. World Health Organization. *The optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding*. Geneva: WHO, 2001.

2. National Health & Medical Research council. *Dietary guidelines for children and adolescents in Australia incorporating the Infant feeding guidelines for health workers*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003.

3. Smith JP. *Human milk supply in Australia*. Food Policy; 1999, 24: 71-91

4. León-Cava N, Lutter C, Ross J, Martin L. *Quantifying the benefits of breastfeeding: A summary of the evidence*. Washington, D.C.: Pan American Health Organization, 2002.