

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding.

I am a mother of 3 children aged 11, 7 and 2.5 years, and a member of the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA). I am a qualified Community Educator with the ABA, and have done a variety of voluntary work for the Association over the years. I live in Geelong, Victoria.

I think the Federal Government could do the following to improve the rate of breastfeeding among Australian mothers:

1. Fund the Australian Breastfeeding Association Breastfeeding Helpline. It is a really useful service, provided by well trained and knowledgeable volunteers. I live in a regional area, and the helpline for my state is accessed through a Melbourne phone number. Mothers needing breastfeeding counselling in my town are put off by the fact that they have to make an STD call to get help. The Victorian helpline is in fact a recorded message which tells mothers the phone numbers of volunteer counsellors (who could be anywhere in the state) that mothers can call. Again, mothers in my area are discouraged from calling breastfeeding counsellors because it is most likely that they will have to ring STD to get help. Counselling calls can take a long time (30 to 45 minutes is not uncommon) and many mothers in my town find the cost of an STD call that long to be too much. A freecall Helpline would be much more likely to be used by women in regional centres like Geelong.

The ABA runs Breastfeeding Helplines in all states and territories, but each Helpline has a different number. Thus the ABA publications which show the Helpline numbers have 9 different numbers listed. This creates a lot of confusion.

The Federal Government could assist mothers to access this service by funding a common freecall Helpline. It would be great if all publications, whether those of ABA or other organizations, could list the one number for the whole country. It would be ideal if the Federal Government could fund this service so it could automatically direct incoming calls to the phones of the volunteer counsellors, rather than just be an answering service that required those needing assistance to make another call. This would be particularly useful for those living in regional centres like Geelong

2. Fund the training of breastfeeding counsellors and community educators of the Australian Breastfeeding Association. I recommend that the members of the Committee conducting this inquiry take a good look at the amount of work and resources being produced by the volunteers of the Australian Breastfeeding Association. Look at the website, and all the information it has for the public. Look at the programs being run by groups all over Australia. In Geelong alone, we have six meetings a month, with a trained counsellor at every one, usually with a discussion chaired by the counsellor. Look at the total amount of work being done by our Association, and Committee members will be able to see what a useful service ABA is doing to promote breastfeeding. Although most of us are happy to volunteer our time to do ABA work, fundraising to train new breastfeeding counsellors and community educators, and keep current breastfeeding counsellors and community educators up to date with the latest research is a drain on our organization. The Federal Government could alleviate the need to do so much fundraising by funding the training of our breastfeeding counsellors and community educators to some nominal sum, such as \$250 per head. Each state branch of ABA could distribute this money, as each branch is responsible for putting on an annual training seminar for their volunteers.

3. Implement the World Health Organization International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes in full. The Marketing in Australia of Infant Formulas: Manufacturers and Importers Agreement (MAIF) agreement is just not working. The WHO Code is superior to the MAIF agreement. There are flagrant breaches of the WHO Code in Australia all the time and I am ashamed that my Government cares so little for the health of Australian babies that it does not protect them by implementing the WHO Code. Other countries are proud signatories to the WHO Code. Does the Australian Government think that Australian babies are somehow immune from the damage that infant formula causes? That Australian women don't suffer from a high rate of breast cancer because the duration of breastfeeding in this country is so short (women who breastfeed for a long period of time ie several years in total, have a lower rate of breast cancer)? That Australian babies don't suffer from a host of diseases and poor health as a result of not

receiving breastmilk? The Federal Government should stand up for the health of women and children in Australia, as well as taxpayers who foot the bill for the cost of treating the diseases caused by infant formula, and implement the WHO Code.

Some of the more gross breaches of the WHO Code that I am aware of recently are:

- The Victorian Government accepting sponsorship from Wyeth, an infant formula manufacturer, for a Maternal and Child Health Nurses conference on August 11, 2006. The sponsoring of the MCH nurses conference is a direct breach of the WHO Code, article 7.3 which states:
No financial or material inducements to promote products within the scope of this Code should be offered by manufacturers or distributors to health workers or members of their families, nor should these be accepted by health workers or members of their families.
- Advertising of infant formula as a loss leader by Coles, in particular S-26 Gold Alpha Pro Step 1 and Step 2, manufactured by Wyeth. This product was shown on the front page of the junk mail catalogue I received at my home on September 17, 2006, advertised at a price of \$14, with the additional information that this was a discount of \$7.30, and that Coles was limiting the product to 3 per customer. This promotion was also the subject of a full page ad in the Herald Sun on September 21, 2006. In both cases the page depicted only two products, nappies and infant formula, so the products were extremely prominent.

These advertisements are breaches of the WHO Code articles as follows:

Article 5. The general public and mothers

5.1 There should be no advertising or other form of promotion to the general public of products within the scope of this Code.

5.3 In conformity with paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article, there should be no point-of-sale advertising, giving of samples, or any other promotion device to induce sales directly to the consumer at the retail level, such as special displays, discount coupons, premiums, special sales, loss leaders and tie-in sales, for products within the scope of this Code. This provision should not restrict the establishment of pricing policies and practices intended to provide products at lower prices on a long-term basis.

- Advertising of discounted infant formula is not restricted to Coles or Wyeth. In recent times I have collected junk mail advertising as follows:
Heinz Nurture Gold Formula Starter, Follow On or Toddler by a local pharmacy (August 3 2006)
Karicare Gold 1 or 2, by Priceline Pharmacy (You pay less!) on November 2, 2006
Wyeth S-26 Gold 1 or 2, by Coles, on July 17 and August 7, 2006
Karicare Gold 1, 2 or 3 by Coles on February 26, 2006
- Labelling of baby foods, such as Heinz products (lamb and vegetables, chicken noodles and vegetables etc) as being suitable for babies of 4-6 months. The WHO recommends that babies be exclusively breastfed for six months. Any foods that are marketed or labelled as being suitable for babies under six months replace breastmilk and harm babies. These products should be withdrawn from sale in Australia or have their labelling changed to reflect WHO recommendations, ie suitable from 6 months up only.

4. Make it compulsory for infant formula to carry warnings about the risks of the product. Governments in Australia are very good at warning the public about the risks of products that, while legal, constitute a significant health risk. Tobacco products are legal but carry health risks, so they are restricted in many ways and carry labels which baldly state the harm the product can cause. I think infant formula should carry similar labels. Many parents who are expecting their baby for the first time have the attitude that "I'll breastfeed if I can, but if I can't then formula is just the same". They buy a can of formula to have on hand

in the pantry “just in case” and set the scene for giving up breastfeeding. It would be good if infant formula cans were clearly labelled with texts such as “Infant formula can give your baby allergies, constipation, juvenile diabetes, asthma, and heart disease. For assistance with breastfeeding your baby, call the Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline on Freecall 1800 xxx xxx”. The people who use the product would then have some of the information about the harm infant formula causes, as well as a way to get help with breastfeeding. If it is good enough for tobacco to be covered in revolting pictures of cancer and have a third of the packet devoted to warnings, why not infant formula?

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