



re: The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Aging Inquiry into Breastfeeding in Australia.

My name is Sherylee Tutt and I am a mother of three breastfed children. I became firmly convinced of the need for breastfeeding support when I was pregnant with my first child in 1996, as I found there was the expectation that it would all just come naturally, without any assistance required. Of course, after the birth of my daughter, I quickly found that this was not so and support was very much needed.

1. One of the most difficult situations was the lack of time that the midwives could spend with individual mothers to assist them with the early days of breastfeeding. This unfortunate situation has not changed in the 9 years between my first and third children. I would like the federal government to find a way for all new mothers to have individual breastfeeding support, both before and especially after the birth of their children. I would like to see health professionals offer to enrol pregnant mothers in breastfeeding peer support groups, especially the Australian Breastfeeding Association where there are already systems in place to educate and support mothers. Funding to automatically enrol mothers in the Australian Breastfeeding Association would be of immeasurable benefit and show strong support for breastfeeding.
2. After the birth of my daughter, I also found myself being given totally inaccurate information regarding breastfeeding from a doctor. This resulted in my daughter being given artificial baby milk in hospital, with the result that she is now cow's milk intolerant, which is a proven risk of unnecessary artificial milk supplementation, even from a single exposure. Unfortunately, this risk was not explained to me even though she had more than one bottle. Her intolerance first manifested as bleeding from the bowel when she was 4 months old, necessitating several stressful visits to doctors and specialists and several medical tests. I can now see that this was such an unnecessary burden on my baby, myself and the health system. The baseline breastfeeding education of health professionals is woefully inadequate and it is paramount that the federal government rectify this. Almost every mother that I speak with, comment that the majority of health professionals are not confident in their breastfeeding knowledge. Having all maternity hospitals accredited as Baby Friendly would be a bonus.
3. Please do not leave breastfeeding education of parents and health professionals to infant formula manufacturers!
4. There is an incredible, incredible, incredible need for a major public health campaign to the general public to educate them of the importance of breastfeeding and how they can be supportive of new mothers to breastfeed their babies. My own experience has seen me be asked to breastfeed outside of a shopping centre mall, and having to educate my own family on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding of my babies until 6 months of age, and then continuing breastfeeding past 2 years old. I firmly believe that the general public has a right to know of the risks of premature weaning of all babies and how not breastfeeding leaves babies at risk of so many of the other medical conditions that might be in the "spotlight". With this knowledge and support in the general community, many more mothers will feel supported to breastfeed their babies.
5. One of the messages that needs to be told to the public is to trust the signs of adequate breastmilk supply. The majority of mothers seem to worry about their milk supply, especially if the baby is feeding frequently, and they need to be supported to breastfeed through these stressful times. If a mother doubts her milk supply, she is often told that the only choice is to supplement with artificial baby milk, which is so contradictory to what is probably actually required and often leads to premature weaning.
6. I would like the federal government to seriously provide for universal paid maternity leave for at least six months. These early months are so necessary for mothers to establish breastfeeding.
7. I know that many mothers feel pressured to wean their babies when they do return to paid work, as there is so incredibly little support for breastfeeding from employers. Employers need to be educated about the economic realities of premature weaning of babies and to be rewarded when they actively support breastfeeding.

An implemented baby-friendly workplace policy might attract a tax incentive perhaps? This makes economic sense for the federal government in the public health savings of healthy breastfed babies, and would go a long way in showing "real" government commitment to supporting breastfeeding.

8. I would like the Federal government to legislate for a ban on the advertising of infant formula, including toddler formulas. Most of our society seems to be totally convinced that babies will require some artificial baby milk at some stage of their development and indeed, some believe the marketing slogans of the artificial baby milk producers that their toddler products are a health food that helps the brain to grow! I have heard several mothers say that if they weren't healthy, then the government wouldn't let them be sold. Is this true? I think that perhaps the marketers just haven't had any restraints put on their claims, and the "healthy" advertising message has been allowed through.

9. Maybe there should also be a warning on the dangers of the (especially early) use of dummies and bottle teats. All products nowadays seem to claim to be just like a breastfeeding nipple and help prevent colic etc. They can never be like a breastfeeding nipple and again, the very real risks of artificial teats in a baby's mouth should be told to parents, health professionals and the general public. Again, legislation to prevent unfounded claims is really what is needed.

10. It is my understanding that the Australian government is a signatory of the World Health Organisation Code of Practice for the Marketing of Infant Formula, but has opted for a voluntary adherence to this code. Please, if the government is to take a strong stance on supporting breastfeeding, this code does need to be legislated -along with changing the labelling of baby foods so they reflect the 6 months exclusive breastfeeding message!

11. I would like breastfeeding to be introduced into the curriculum of all levels of education. To me this is a strong step towards making Australia a "breastfeeding-friendly" society, where breastfeeding is the normal way to feed babies and all mothers are supported.

12. I, finally, would like to see the government make a strong fiscal commitment to support breastfeeding through financial support of the Australian Breastfeeding Association. The volunteer health workers of this organisation are priceless and their work already well and truly pays for itself in the health system savings of healthy babies and mothers. It is long overdue that the Australian government show full support of the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Thanking you most sincerely,
Sherylee Tutt