

Submission no. 88

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This submission addresses in part the following points:

- a. the extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding;
- b. evaluate the impact of marketing of breast milk substitutes on breastfeeding rates and, in particular, in disadvantaged, Indigenous and remote communities;
- c. the potential short and long term impact on the health of Australians of increasing the rate of breastfeeding;
- d. initiatives to encourage breastfeeding;
- e. examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding; and
- f. the impact of breastfeeding on the long term sustainability of Australia's health system."

* Health professionals are barely educated about breastfeeding and lactation unless they choose to attend one of the seminars or conferences organised by the Australian Breastfeeding Association. The little information they do receive while studying may be out of date by the time they begin working with mothers.

* Fully breastfed babies rarely get many diseases such as rotavirus (the federal government wants to fund a vaccine for rotavirus that would be unnecessary if all children were breastfed)

* Parents are bombarded with advertising about infant formula and toddler formulas by drug companies that barely pay lip service to the fact that breastfeeding is the natural way to feed babies and toddlers. Toddler formulas are not necessary if children have a good diet, including breastfeeding. Infant formulas should be available by prescription only when medically indicated. Infant formula companies neglect to tell purchasers of the risks of not breastfeeding. This should be printed on the packages in a similar way to the warnings on cigarette packets as the risks of not breastfeeding are similar in magnitude to the risks of smoking.

* Expectant parents have little access to current, research based information about breastfeeding unless they pay to attend a Breastfeeding Education Class run by the Australian Breastfeeding Association. These classes are run by unpaid VOLUNTEERS.

* Many mothers give up breastfeeding due to lack of education, lack of incentive to persevere, the incorrect assumption (due to advertising) that infant formula is "just as good", lack of support from health professionals, pressure from family, friends and the community.

* Parents who subscribe to the Australian Breastfeeding Association breastfeed with more success and for longer than most other parents. This is due to the information and support that they receive through the association. Government should ensure that all new mothers have access to this information and support by spending \$50 of their maternity payment on a subscription to ABA.

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