

Margot Trinder

I write the following submission as both a mother who is strongly committed to the benefits of breastfeeding and also as a psychologist who is well aware of positive ways in which public attitudes and behaviour can be changed.

My submission:

There are many successful examples in Australia and overseas of campaigns that have successfully changed the way communities view certain behaviours. Smoking, drink-driving, sunbaking are just a few examples of behaviours that were once acceptable and even promoted in our community (remembering as always that the promotion of these behaviours comes directly from the manufacturers of the products whose only desire is financial). Once the negative effects of these behaviours on people's longer term health (or their direct contribution to ill health) became evident, multifaceted campaigns were put in place to both educate the community and attempt to change behaviour. Breastfeeding can be seen in a similar light. At present in our community, breastfeeding and formula feeding are viewed as equivalent – the misguided belief that the only difference is mode of delivery. Breastfeeding is not promoted, encouraged or supported as evidenced by our low rates.

The benefits of breastfeeding and the risks of formula feeding need to be part of a concerted campaign that leads to our community developing a strong and positive attitude towards breastfeeding. If not smoking, moderate drinking and pale skin can become acceptable and promoted within our community, surely the status of breastfeeding can also be elevated.

This public education campaign would of course form one part of a multifaceted strategy aimed to support mothers to breastfeed and improve the health and wellbeing of our community.