

Address and phone number added this time!!

Submission for Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding

I am Suzanne Groom of [redacted] and I meet with a lot of mothers through my volunteer work at playgroups, schools and sports groups every week.

Some of the stories I hear from mothers are about the lack of training given to health professionals about breastfeeding. This means they are not able to give mothers correct information about breastfeeding. Things such as only breastfeeding 4 hourly, wrapping a baby and putting it down in a cot to settle rather than holding when no studies have been done to see the long term psychological impacts of leaving babies to cry, mothers being told there are no nutritional benefits of breastfeeding after 12 months of age. Mothers tell me they are often leaving hospital too soon after the birth of their baby and before breastfeeding has become established. This can be because of crowded wards where not enough room is given to mothers and babies for their privacy at what is probably the most stressful time in their lives. Or it can be because it is encouraged. The problems that develop after they leave hospital care often develop into a situation they cannot resolve such as poor attachment of the baby to feed leading to sore and cracked nipples and it becomes hard to get the baby to change once it is in that habit. Other things mums tell me are about not knowing about when to introduce solid foods to baby, a baby's diet because the labeling on commercial baby foods say something different to the Child Health Nurse advice and that is different again to what their mothers did. Mothers returning to work are often pressured to return before they are ready by their employers and are not able to pursue their preferred option of part-time and job sharing. Some mothers in regional areas go through stressful times as they cannot access breastfeeding help when they need it urgently. Babies cannot wait until office hours or after the weekend.

To help these situations I think Health professional training could be extended and for artificial baby milk manufacturers not to be involved in educating health professionals about infant feeding. Training Doctors need more than the small amount of time given at the moment. Midwives etc need to be kept up-to-date with new developments in eg attachment. As recommended by the World Health Organisation, the government should be responsible for providing education on infant feeding. This also includes moving to change baby food labeling laws.

Also we need more public health campaigns targeted at people other than mothers (friends, relatives, employers, people in government) to change old and outdated beliefs about breastfeeding. This campaign should NOT talk about the benefits of breastfeeding but about the importance of breastfeeding and the risks associated with premature weaning from breastfeeding. Most importantly it should also talk about support breastfeeding mothers. Local government and councils also have a role in this.

Resources need to go into enabling women to breastfeed so that resources do not need to be put into treating the illnesses caused by premature weaning, for example the new rotavirus vaccine that the government is funding would be largely unnecessary if most babies were exclusively breastfed for 6 months.

Paid maternity leave would enable women to choose and make it easier for women to keep breastfeeding. Many mothers do not want to go to work while their babies are young and that instead of placing funds into childcare the government might better optimise the health, economic status and well being of society by providing universal paid maternity leave. This will make it easier for mothers to keep breastfeeding. Employers also need to be educated as to the costs saved for them by mothers continuing to breastfeed to reduce the high absenteeism in parents of artificially fed babies.

Government support of volunteer organisations that support breastfeeding such as Australian Breastfeeding Association, Child Health, Playgroup Association so they are able to support mothers and educate them, especially mothers-to-be before their babies are born. This would require co-operation from government and employers.

Finally, education of our younger people from Kinder to Grade 10 that breastfeeding is the normal way babies are fed for the first 6 months and continuing as other foods are introduced and into toddlerhood would mean the next generation would expect and accept these things as normal.

Suzanne Groom