

(For immediate release)



## Media Release

# Breastfeeding – the ‘new’ health initiative

Government support for breastfeeding will increase dramatically from its current levels, recognition that more must be done to protect the health of our youngest Australians – and that helping mothers to breastfeed is the key.

Announced in last night’s federal budget was \$8.7 million over 4 years for breastfeeding education and support. The welcome initiatives include 24-hour support for breastfeeding mothers, an information and education campaign, breastfeeding research and revised NHMRC dietary guidelines.

A Commonwealth parliamentary inquiry, to report in June, is also looking into other ways of supporting more mothers and babies to breastfeed longer.

As Australia’s leading authority on breastfeeding, the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) believes this is a positive endorsement of their Breastfeeding Leadership Plan, which had outlined many of the newly introduced government initiatives. ABA President, Ms Margaret Grove said ‘It is now known that breastfeeding is important to health in later life as well as infancy, and this is acknowledged by including it in the budget’s prevention strategy for chronic disease’.

ABA already has a breastfeeding helpline that supports thousands of women each year, but the need is much greater. “We look forward to being involved in implementing these initial measures, said Ms Grove.

The information campaign is long overdue, but it will be important to pitch the message correctly to ensure new mothers are also linked to skilled and experience help on breastfeeding. Women want to breastfeed - around 90% initiate breastfeeding after birth, but face barriers leading them to wean early. Any awareness campaign needs to include a wider public that can at times be unreceptive to breastfeeding, in order to generate greater community and employer support.

Government initiatives, expected following the report of the parliamentary inquiry into breastfeeding, should also address the wider barriers to breastfeeding in our society. These include addressing urgent needs for adequate paid maternity leave and breastfeeding friendly workplaces, accurate and up to date breastfeeding information and support, and evidence based hospital practices to support breastfeeding. Food industry promotion and marketing that undermine breastfeeding must also be curtailed.

According to Ms Grove, ‘Overall, it is a good package; just as breastfeeding is a good start in life, this is a good start to the Commonwealth’s leadership on breastfeeding.’

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