

MEDIA RELEASE
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Mums highlight importance of breastfeeding support during COVID-19

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) — Australia's peak body for breastfeeding — has launched a new support campaign to help families and mothers who are struggling with coronavirus restrictions and border closures to access the help they need for both them and their baby.

During COVID-19, ABA has played an important role supporting Australian mums and this has paved the way for the *ABA is here for you* campaign. ABA provided unprecedented support for pregnant women and new parents who had been left without their usual support structures due to social distancing restrictions, including the closure of ante- and postnatal services in March.

Tasmanian mum Megan Nayler, whose daughter Lumi was born in June, had to cancel her baby shower and start isolation with her husband from mid-March. After Lumi's birth, Megan said the support she received from ABA meant she was able to carry on breastfeeding her daughter through the stresses and challenges of COVID-19.

'It's scary to have a baby during a pandemic. You have a perception in your mind of what pregnancy and having your first baby will feel like and it was so different to that,' Megan said.

'I was so overwhelmed by it all, with no one but my husband able to visit us in hospital that I ended up leaving the hospital on day 2 — much earlier than I'd anticipated.

'I had a few issues with breastfeeding and my mother-in-law put me in touch with ABA who stepped in with lots of support — mentally for me and physically so I could breastfeed Lumi. It was a lifesaver. I can guarantee without Rosalie (my mother-in-law) and ABA I would not be still breastfeeding.

'I had always felt that breastfeeding was something I wanted to do for my children, for all the health benefits for both Lumi and me. These became far more apparent after I had read the ABA booklets before she was born. There are so many benefits I hadn't even thought of, not to mention the emotional bond it creates between us. I wanted to be sure that Lumi got off to a great start: I'm her source of food, comfort, security and health. I knew that if I had questions regarding breastfeeding's importance I could easily approach Rosalie or ABA for up-to-date and accurate research-based information.'

At the start of the pandemic, ABA moved all of its breastfeeding support services online, including breastfeeding education classes and local support groups. This has allowed more parents than ever to access ABA's services.

Naomi Hull, ABA Senior Manager Breastfeeding Information and Research, says stories like Megan's have been common during the pandemic. They show that breastfeeding support services have never been more important during the time of change, stress and uncertainty that often comes from having a baby, let alone having a baby during a pandemic.

'Mums with newborns — sometimes just days old — have been able to connect with other parents through our online services at a time when they were otherwise completely isolated', Ms Hull said.

'We're excited for this new campaign to continue supporting mothers and families as we emerge out of this crisis and adapt to this new normal. ABA is here to support new mums wherever they are in their journey.'

Since the start of the pandemic, ABA has seen an increase in the number of families calling the Breastfeeding Helpline. In April, the Breastfeeding Helpline received 6103 calls, a 20% call increase

compared to the monthly average.

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National media enquiries (staffed 24/7) – 03 9686 6096 or marketing@breastfeeding.asn.au