Australian Breastfeeding Association

Annual report

2020–2021

breastfeeding.asn.au

October 2021
Australian Breastfeeding Association

Suite 2, Level 3,
150 Albert Road
South Melbourne VIC 3205

PO Box 33221
Melbourne VIC 3004

Email: info@breastfeeding.asn.au

ABN: 64 005 081 523 RTO: 21659

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Our impact in 2020-2021

72,922 calls and instant chats received

66,609 Breastfeeding Helpline calls

6313 parents reaching out via LiveChat

79% of calls supported

558 qualified breastfeeding counsellors supported Breastfeeding Helpline

25,668+ hours of expertise donated to the Breastfeeding Helpline alone

206 registrations for workshops from the Diploma of Breastfeeding Management

Resourcing and informing **3893+** health professionals

880 attendances at ABA's Health Professional Seminars

Our impact in 2020-2021 *continued*

4595+ hours of world-class breastfeeding education

1752+ mums and their support people prepared

via 154 online workshops and in-person classes

reaching **237,616** employees

35 Best Practice organisations

124 Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace accreditations

183 evidence-led breastfeeding articles

2,215,486 breastfeeding.asn.au page visits

40,000 podcast plays

187,779+ people informed and supported at **61** community events

70,589+ expectant parents reached at **10** baby expos

36% of LiveChat users from rural or remote areas

98% would recommend LiveChat

85% felt less worried after LiveChat

80% had their concerns resolved

97 qualified volunteers guiding mums to best-practice breastfeeding information

1216 mums helped in reaching their breastfeeding goals with breast pump hire

How it helped ...

47% to increase milk supply or give EBM top-ups

31% feeding or attachment issues

15% because baby was ill in hospital/NICU

7% other

President's report

The pandemic challenged the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) again this year. Despite these difficulties our volunteers continued to support ABA activities such as the National Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat and local group activities.

A large portion of volunteers found their ABA work difficult while grappling with lockdowns and physical and mental health. Some juggled working from home with homeschooling or looking after small children, and we saw more resignations of volunteers than our usual natural attrition.

However, due to the nature of our national organisation there were many positives. Our new Breastfeeding Education Live sessions (BELs) proved a boon for expectant parents when many of the face-to-face classes were closed. These online interactive activities with opportunities to ask questions also provided parents with ABA resources to help mothers breastfeeding in the early days and beyond.

ABA's National Breastfeeding Helpline funded by the Commonwealth Government was well used, especially by those in lockdown without their extended family to support them. Our LiveChat is increasingly popular as well as our mum2mum app.

Our Executive Officer, Victoria Marshall-Cerins, completed her first year with ABA and she is proving to be an enormous asset to our Association. Among her many achievements, Victoria has worked collaboratively with paid staff and volunteers alike, restructured the National Support Office (NSO) and initiated a website redevelopment that was long overdue. This redevelopment will be central to a campaign to increase membership and retain members, and to provide volunteers with a modern website to support their work.

ABA is more than our Helpline Services. We have local groups all around Australia to support mothers and their families. During the pandemic, many group activities went online either through social media or Zoom meetings.

Victoria commissioned a survey to assess needs and expectations of local ABA groups, so we can continue to support mothers at the grassroots level as societal needs change. Anecdotally we hear that the new generation of mothers is more inclined to seek information online than to pick up a phone to ask for help. However, they still have a need to socialise with other mothers in their local area. ABA groups are well placed to fill this need as well as provide them with breastfeeding information and support.

Social media has become a much larger part of what ABA offers, with our new Breastfeeding with ABA Facebook group proving very popular. Moderation of these groups can be challenging, and we are continually looking at our policies and guidelines to improve these processes. There was also the launch of our highly successful podcast series *Breastfeeding … with ABA* that has already acquired a huge number of followers.

It has been a pleasure to preside over the ABA Board and draw on the expertise of the directors. As well as the usual work of governance, strategy, risk management, and overseeing finances and other processes, there are always challenges that come up from time to time. I appreciate the flexibility of the directors and their willingness to act in a timely manner and make considered decisions where necessary.

At the 27 November 2020 ABA Board meeting, we welcomed Louise Brown to the Board to fill the position left by Steve Miller who resigned on 23 July 2020. Steve deserves a huge thank you for the enormous contributions he made during his time on the Board, especially given his expertise in IT.

Erin Vlasveld resigned as an ABA director on 7 July 2020 and we will miss Erin's financial expertise and her ability to analyse information and ask pertinent questions.

The delegated three, consisting of Karin Collinson (Honorary Treasurer), Keith Anderson (Vice President) and myself as President, have worked with Victoria during her first

year and it has been a very productive team. I would like to give Karin and Keith a huge thank you for their support during the year.

The ABA Board has sub-committees in the areas of strategy, governance, risk, finance and appeals. These committees work in specific areas and report back to the full Board regularly.

The strategy committee finalised the strategic plan for 2020-2023, and the senior managers and Branch Presidents have incorporated this into their operational plans. This is a living document and the strategy committee is monitoring and reviewing the plan to ensure it covers all the essential work of ABA.

With the NSO being in Melbourne, ongoing monitoring and updating of COVID-19 safe practices have been required throughout the year, as state government requirements changed. The office has either been closed or working with a skeleton staff while the majority worked from home. It is a testament to their commitment and organisational skills that ABA has been able to continue administering our services during this time.

The staff members and volunteers involved in national roles have worked exceptionally hard and, in many cases, introduced new initiatives and projects. Branch personnel, too, have been responsive to new ideas and supportive of the volunteers in their branches.

Most annual Branch Conferences were unable to be held this year. With little planning time, an online national conference was held in August 2020. The Branch Conferences are an opportunity for trained ABA volunteers and trainees to have professional development, and to come together to share ideas, refresh their commitment and be re-motivated. While face-to-face events are the ideal, this online conference was a great morale boost to the volunteers who attended. It also allowed those in remote areas or other situations to attend whereas they might not have been able to travel to their usual conference.

We held our annual Health Professional Seminar Series in March 2021 with some live and some online sessions. These were excellent. We are very lucky in Australia to have such a wealth of speakers, since international travel was impossible during the pandemic. ABA's training team is to be commended for achieving this excellent program in difficult circumstances.

ABA offers these seminar series as part of our commitment to health professional education in breastfeeding. We offer a huge range of breastfeeding information that health professionals can access on ABA's website, as well as modules, a book *Breastfeeding Management in Australia*, our peer-reviewed journal *Breastfeeding Review* and a Diploma course in Breastfeeding Management.

ABA is an inclusive organisation and gives breastfeeding support to anyone who needs it. While ABA continues to offer mother-to-mother support using the same language as we have always done, we also produce resources, which employ specific language to a subset of the community. Our Breastfeeding Information and Research (BIR) and Training teams have overseen the production of new resources for Rainbow Families, a group that supports the LGBTQIA+ community. These include a specific booklet and series of BELs.

ABA's Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace (BFW) accreditation program has been challenged by the pandemic again this year, although a recent customer satisfaction survey showed that this program is very well received and that the BFW staff are responsive and helpful.

I would like to thank all who bring their skills and passions to ABA, and who have managed to keep their commitment to ABA during this very challenging year. As a volunteer peer support organisation, we have continued to offer breastfeeding information and support to mothers and their families. This year has seen the need for our volunteers and paid staff alike to be adaptable in their roles, and on behalf of the ABA Board I would like to express our appreciation of your commitment to our wonderful Association.

Margaret Grove, President

Executive Officer's summary

Solidarity, strength and support

Volunteering Australia has found that 66% of volunteers stopped volunteering at some stage this year, with approximately 2.3 million fewer volunteers by April 2021 compared to late 2019. This research also found that the decline was larger for women than men. These statistics reflect the challenges that so many Australians faced in juggling commitments and navigating the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. At the same time, charities across the country have reported increased need and demand for their services.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) was similarly impacted during 2020–2021. We have seen a small drop in our volunteer numbers, accompanied by a surge in demand for our services. Extraordinarily, our qualified volunteer team collectively rose to the occasion. We maintained our response rate with reduced personnel and, as demonstrated by the extraordinary satisfaction rates from users of our Breastfeeding Helpline service (94%), our qualified volunteer team continued to deliver a world-class service.

Vision

Breastfeeding is recognised as important by all Australians and is culturally normal.

Mission

As Australia's leading authority on breastfeeding, we support, educate and advocate for a breastfeeding-inclusive society.

Breastfeeding peer support

When many healthcare services and traditional supports were unavailable to new parents, our local groups moved their face-to-face meetups online and continued to be there for mums and their families.

Our live online breastfeeding education program continued to provide invaluable learning experiences for expectant parents. The availability of breastfeeding education online also enabled us to increase our reach to rural and remote areas and to families with very young babies (<18 days old).

Similarly, our LiveChat service provided an invaluable support to mums in 2020–2021, with more than a third of the 6313 users who initiated a chat living in rural and remote areas.

Our extensive network of local groups continued to ensure that mums who needed a breast pump to achieve their breastfeeding goals could still access this vital service. More than 1200 mums did so via our contactless COVID-safe pump hire service. Our qualified volunteers provided tailored information to families as they navigated the issues leading them to hire a pump, increasing their chances of success.

In 2020–2021 a group of passionate and skilled volunteers launched the *Breastfeeding … with ABA* podcast and blog. It now regularly charts highly in the iTunes 'Kids & Family' category, and has received more than 40,000 plays.

Our extraordinary 24-hour a day, 7-day a week National Breastfeeding Helpline reached a significant milestone this year. On 5 May, our 1 millionth call came in from a mum of a 6-week-old baby born in the midst of COVID restrictions. More than 5550 calls came into the Breastfeeding Helpline each month.

Everything we do at ABA is based upon evidence. We are constantly working to ensure that our digital and hardcopy resources, as well as our website, meet the needs of breastfeeding mothers and their families. In 2020–2021 this work included new videos on topics such as tongue-tie, mastitis and sore nipples; LGBTQIA+ community specific resources; and translations of our easy English publication, *How Breastfeeding Works* into 14 community languages.

Health professional education

Our 2021 Health Professional Seminar series, *Breastfeeding: Cues for Success*, was offered in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth with 880 in-person and online attendees.

Our 10243NAT Diploma of Breastfeeding Management course transitioned online in response to COVID-19 restrictions. With the diploma workshops now also available as standalone professional development events, ABA attracted a larger and more diverse audience of health professionals, while maintaining continuity for students, thus strengthening their lactation knowledge, skills and support expertise.

Our educational offerings to health professionals expanded in 2020-2021 to include free and low-cost eLearning modules and live panel discussion sessions on current breastfeeding-related topics.

The pace of ABA's research collaboration and support was also sustained this year, with seven external and two internal research projects. We were also a collaborator with researchers from the Menzies Centre for Health Policy at the University of Sydney that resulted in a published paper entitled, 'Using citizen science to engage the public in monitoring workplace breastfeeding support in Australia'.

Community education

ABA's national network of local support groups regularly connects parents of children at every stage within more than 130 communities Australia-wide every week. In 2020-2021 our qualified volunteers raised awareness and provided information to more than 187,700 parents at community and parenting events. They also provided countless community education presentations to local organisations and healthcare services about the importance of breastfeeding and the role of the community in supporting mothers and babies.

Advocacy

In a year where businesses were heavily impacted by the pandemic, our Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces program experienced increased interest and uptake. A customer satisfaction survey of the 124 accredited businesses found that employers rate the program's value for money as excellent/good and were highly likely to recommend it to others.

In 2020-2021 ABA was proud to offer our expertise to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC's) consultation to reauthorise the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula: Manufacturers and Importers Agreement (MAIF). We offered our support for the short-term reauthorisation of the MAIF Agreement, on the proviso that additional work occur to limit toddler milk advertising.

This year ABA was pleased to be invited to join the Department of Health's advisory committee to support the implementation of the *Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy*. We very much look forward to working with the Government to deliver on the promises within the Strategy.

Despite the pandemic environment, ABA's performance this year was exceptional. I am deeply grateful for the dedication and generosity of our volunteers, staff and Board members. They have given so much this year to provide Australia's mums and their families with the information and support they need, to be able to breastfeed for as long as they choose.

Victoria Marshall-Cerins, Executive Officer

Board of directors

Margaret Grove, President

BA (Hons) Dip Ed MA Certificate IV in Breastfeeding Education Certificate IV in Training and Assessment

Margaret Grove has been a breastfeeding counsellor since 1983. Her ABA roles over the years have included group leader, branch training manager and Director.

Margaret was on the ABA Board from 2001 for 7 years, 3 as National President. She was then the community representative on the Advisory Panel for the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula (APMAIF) from 2009 to 2013, before returning to the ABA Board in 2018 and has been President since 2019.

Margaret and husband Geoff have three children and three grandchildren, and during her non-ABA time she plays *taiko* (Japanese drums), enjoys Pilates, singing in choirs and writing engaging secondary school textbooks.

Keith Anderson

BSc (Hons) DipEd GradDipSciEd

Keith started in breastfeeding education in 1975 when teaching reproduction topics to senior school students, while also encouraging his wife Joy to breastfeed their children. For over 30 years Keith has supported Joy (ABA honorary member and former director) in her ABA roles. This included initiating and hosting the first email discussion group (bcnet), giving talks at branch conferences, and assisting with the design and layout of ABA publications.

Now retired, Keith was previously Deputy Principal at a private girls' school where he presented papers at international conferences, implemented major programmes and was involved in the School Council.

Karin Collinson, Honorary Treasurer

BCom MAdvTax CTA

Karin has been an ABA Breastfeeding Counsellor since 1992. She has held many volunteer roles in the Association, including group leader, and presently is a trainer and assessor with ABA.

Before retiring, Karin's paid work positions included various senior leadership positions within the Australian Taxation Office. She holds a Bachelor of Commerce from UWA, a Masters of Advanced Taxation from UNSW and is a Chartered Tax Adviser with the Tax Institute.

Karin is a passionate advocate for breastfeeding and the need to provide support to parents and workplaces to encourage and increase breastfeeding rates.

Louise Brown

BSc BDSc IBCLC Cert IV Breastfeeding Education

Louise has been a member of ABA since 2002. She has held roles at local, regional and branch level. Apart from her professional knowledge, Louise also brings to the Board governance skills from serving on management committees.

She is passionate about the role ABA plays to ensure breastfeeding women and their families have access to support and evidence-based knowledge to guide them on their breastfeeding journeys.

Sally Eldridge

BA Grad Cert Public Sector Administration Cert IV Breastfeeding Community Education

Sally has been a community educator and advocate of ABA since 2003. Leading the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces program from 2003 to 2007, Sally oversaw its rebranding and growth, and contributed to ABA's campaign for paid parental leave and the *Parliamentary Inquiry into Breastfeeding in Australia*.

Sally had a 32-year career in the Commonwealth Public Service in policy, program and case management roles across several states and overseas postings.

In addition to her board position, Sally contributes to the Advocacy Working Group and the Breastfeeding Friendly Environments programs. Sally lives in Canberra with her partner and has two adult children.

Board of directors *continued*

Daile Kelleher

In her professional life, Daile manages a not-for-profit focusing on women's health in Queensland.

Her governance experience includes committee membership in Ending Violence Against Women Queensland, ANROWS (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety) Practitioner Engagement Group, and the Women's Health Services Alliance of Queensland.

Daile has a happy and healthy breastfed baby who attends board meetings with her. While this can create a distraction for board members at times, it also reminds us of why we do what we do! She lives in Brisbane with her husband, 2 stepchildren, baby and a very grumpy cat.

Fiona McClure

MSc International Mgt BA Hons Modern Languages Grad Dip Human Resource Mgt

Fiona is an HR transformation consultant with almost 10 years' experience working with senior executives to provide support and strategic advice during a wide range of HR and business transformations.

Fiona has broad sector experience across retail, telecommunications, health care, financial services, higher education and the public sector, and has worked in Asia Pacific, Europe and Latin America.

Raised in the UK, Fiona has lived and worked in Melbourne since 2016 and recently started her breastfeeding journey with the birth of her son in late 2019.

Mary Peterson

MSc Public Policy, BA Public Relations & Advertising, Dip Gov ICDA, Cert IV Breastfeeding Education, Dip Childbirth Education

Mary's background is in public relations with experience spanning industries such as international tourism, politics, secondary and early childhood education.

As a skilled event coordinator she has delivered national workshops, health professional seminars and large fundraising events.

Her interest lies in systems changes to protect human rights. Mary has been involved with ABA since 2014, is a volunteer breastfeeding counsellor, has served as SA/NT Branch President and is currently serving as Group Leader for Darwin-Palmerston and Rural.

Cate Uhe

BSc (Hons) Grad Dip Ed Dip Business Management Dip Breastfeeding Management Cert IV in Training & Assessment Cert IV in Management (Frontline and Human Resources) Cert IV in Breastfeeding Education

Cate has volunteered for ABA for 29 years, across local, regional, branch, national and board levels, and within several states. She has returned to the ABA Board after returning from overseas where she continued to work as an ABA volunteer.

Cate has very strong communication and project management skills and an extensive background in human resources and volunteer management through her work in the community sector as a manager. In addition, she has many years of experience in training, coaching and mentoring.

Volunteer training

In what was a challenging year for many, including our volunteers and their families, the Training and Education team maintained the delivery of the 10280NAT Cert IV in Breastfeeding Education and the 10243NAT Diploma of Breastfeeding Management.

Certificate IV

As lockdowns and other restrictions were rolled out across the country, ABA was able to quickly and effectively respond, by introducing the following support measures for trainees completing their Cert IV in Breastfeeding Education:

- Waiving of enrolment extension fees for those whose enrolment was expiring in June 2021.
- Increasing enrolment extensions from 12 to 18 months to enable trainees to continue the course at a slower pace and thus reduce dropouts.
- Adding online options for practical assessment tasks where face-to-face requirements could not be met.
- Leniency for trainees nearing course completion who were unable to accrue the required 150 volunteer hours due to restrictions.
- General recognition of the difficulties faced by families and individual follow-up and support where needed.

'I am part of ABA's Training Team, which supports and trains new breastfeeding counsellors and community educators. It's wonderful to support these engaged, amazing trainees who are ABA's future, and to do so in a community of supportive and passionate trainers and assessors.' **Kathryn, Breastfeeding Counsellor and Trainer, NSW**

110
enrolments into Cert IV of Breastfeeding Education, with 52 completing

8
enrolments into the Diploma, with 6 completing

'In a really difficult part of motherhood, when I needed ABA, I made a mental note to come back and train to be a volunteer one day … Volunteering with the ABA gives me a sense of satisfaction. I've met friends who I wouldn't have met otherwise. I've learnt new things and had many new experiences … As a stay-at-home mum searching for something just for me, ABA has given me exactly that.' **Jemma, Breastfeeding Counsellor, Gladstone, QLD**

Volunteer training *continued*

Professional development

National conference

ABA also responded to the postponement or cancellation of many scheduled branch conferences due to COVID-19, by holding its first-ever online national professional development conference for volunteers.

2020 Vision: Keeping abreast of the new normal was held on Saturday 8 August 2020, starting with a welcome address by our Founder, Mary Paton AM. Pre-conference keynote and post-conference presentations were provided, allowing volunteers to interact and discuss concepts within Q&A sessions. Conference keynote presentations were recorded and made available to those unable to attend. Several presentations were also made available for health professionals to access.

Due to COVID lockdowns, five out of six branches (all but the Queensland Branch, pictured right) were unable to host their annual state-based conferences.

> 'I still found myself energised and motivated after this conference, just as I would with a face-to-face.' **Conference feedback**

70%
highly recommended the online conference format

More than
80%
of volunteers and trainees rated the online conference as 'excellent' or 'very good'

Other professional development opportunities for volunteers

There were 37 online professional development activities, encompassing video presentations or interviews with ABA volunteers talking about their roles. Topics included: how to support expectant parents from the LGBTQIA+ community, facilitating a Breastfeeding Education Live (BEL) workshop and how to get involved, overnight shifts on the Breastfeeding Helpline, and how to promote volunteering with ABA. Eleven mothers shared their breastfeeding journey, spanning everything from having a baby during the COVID-19 pandemic, having a baby with additional needs, returning to work and challenging situations.

Queensland Branch Conference, May 2021

Queensland Branch Conference, May 2021

Our volunteers

Volunteer reporting

In 2020–2021, ABA had the highest-ever completion rate for volunteer reporting, at 86%.

This reporting provided additional insight regarding volunteer activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. It overwhelmingly showed that volunteers were able to adapt to meet the needs of breastfeeding mothers during the pandemic.

Volunteer reporting snapshot

- Generally, net promoter scores increased from previous years, with a **near 'excellent' score**.
- Score of 46 (almost 'excellent') to the question, '**How likely are you to recommend being a qualified volunteer with ABA to other members in your local group?**'

- Score of 44 (almost 'excellent') to the question, '**How likely are you to recommend the training in Cert IV Breastfeeding Education to those members in your local group?**'

Volunteer stories

Our volunteers are the beating heart of ABA.

In an extraordinarily difficult year, volunteers persevered, continuing to provide support, information and resources to thousands of mums and families around Australia.

ABA volunteers often provided a lifeline to many new mums who were left adrift to navigate first-time parenthood in a global pandemic.

We thank them for their unwavering resilience, diligence and kindness, in the face of constant change, uncertainty and hardship. It is thanks to them that so many breastfeeding journeys can begin and continue.

Queensland Branch volunteers at the Pregnancy, Babies & Children's Expo in Brisbane, QLD, February 2021

'I have been a breastfeeding counsellor for 6 years, and over this time it has been a privilege to support many mums as they navigate the changes and challenges that come along with having a new baby. I have enjoyed running local group meetings and chatting to parents on the Breastfeeding Helpline. Unfortunately, over the last year with COVID-19, I have been unable to give as much time to ABA as I would have liked, but I have enjoyed being a Breastfeeding Helpline mentor and supporting new counsellors as they start their role as breastfeeding counsellors. It is great to see their confidence grow as they support more and more mums. I have also enjoyed taking on the role of group treasurer. My local ABA group was so supportive when I was a new mum and for that reason, I love giving my time to the Association and to my local group.'

Katherine,
Breastfeeding Counsellor,
Sunbury-Macedon Ranges Group, VIC

Our volunteers *continued*

Reassurance

'When I first started on the Breastfeeding Helpline, I felt really unsure. One way of convincing myself I was doing ok was to write down some of the positive feedback I receive right after a call. I then pin it to my counselling information corkboard. It really helps to reassure and give me confidence before each shift.' **Corinne, Breastfeeding Counsellor, Greenwith, SA**

Southern Lakes Group volunteers at the Perth Baby and Children's Market in Rockingham, WA

Toowoomba Group volunteers at the Darling Downs Women's Health Expo, Toowoomba, QLD, September 2021

Victoria Branch volunteers at the Pregnancy, Babies & Children's Expo in Melbourne, VIC, May 2021

'I spoke at a regional meeting of about 50 maternal and child health nurses, which was quite daunting personally but greatly valuable for ABA. I also spoke with nurses from the Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital Special Care Nursery, about their concerns with poor breastfeeding rates past 6 weeks and how ABA could help. This was really interesting and probably a highlight of the year for me.' **Celeste, Group Leader, Adelaide Central Metro, SA**

'Volunteering with ABA means I get to develop my skills while making a real difference. I love meeting mums where they are at and hearing them tell me, "yes, that's exactly how I feel" during a call. I also enjoy facilitating group meetings and fostering mum-to-mum support. It's a great feeling.' **Jane, South-Eastern Suburbs Group, WA**

Breastfeeding Helpline

ABA's National Breastfeeding Helpline reached an incredible milestone on 5 May 2021 when it received its millionth call since the service began in 2008. Not only was this an exciting time for ABA, it highlighted just how essential this free 24/7 support service is to the breastfeeding mums of Australia. The millionth call was made by a mum in Victoria, who shares her story on the right.

The Breastfeeding Helpline continues to be rated very highly amongst callers, with a 94% satisfaction rate in 2020–2021. Most of the callers (97%) said that they would call the Breastfeeding Helpline again and/or would recommend it to friends or family.

The Breastfeeding Helpline is highly valued and trusted, with 36% of callers calling the Breastfeeding Helpline more than once throughout their breastfeeding journey and 8% calling four or more times in the past 12 months.

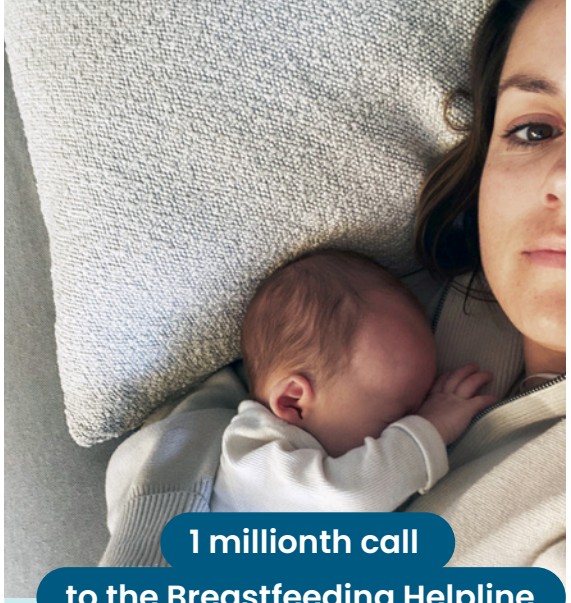
Volunteer Breastfeeding Counsellor, Leanne, took the 1 millionth call to the Breastfeeding Helpline.

'I was so impressed with the lady I spoke to. She was so reassuring and helpful. During our chat, we made a short-term plan to get me through the night and a longer-term plan to get ongoing help and assistance.' **Alana**

Almost half (40%) of the callers said that without the Breastfeeding Helpline, they would have needed to seek face-to-face medical support for their concerns. Importantly, 5% stated that without the Breastfeeding Helpline, they may have ceased breastfeeding their baby.

The majority (80%) of all callers noted that the support they received helped them to resolve their concerns or issues. After their call, the majority of callers said that they felt less worried (86%), less stressed (85%) and more confident in breastfeeding (83%).

'This service is incredible and each time I use it I feel empowered and encouraged I am doing the right thing or am on the right track.' **Amanda**



1 millionth call to the Breastfeeding Helpline

'I am so thankful for this service ABA offers. I phoned on a few different occasions in the first 6 weeks of my baby's life and happened to be the one millionth caller. How fabulous!

I remember this particular call as we had hit a real low in our breastfeeding journey and my son Myles wasn't gaining sufficient weight. After advice to offer tops-ups after each feed to get him back on track, I noticed my supply was decreasing. It was the right thing to do at the time as his health was the most important thing, but after a bit of reading I decided to get comfy at home and feed on demand for a few days to get back on the supply-and-demand chain, and hopefully boost my supply.

I called ABA for reassurance on what I was doing, and the lady I spoke to was so warm and lovely. I started rattling off my worries and she slowed me down, asked my son's name and a few questions about him. It was so nice as I felt she genuinely cared and referred to Myles throughout our conversation. It was like talking to a wise, friendly and supportive aunty.' **Paris, VIC**

Breastfeeding Helpline *continued*

In 2020–2021:

- **66,609 calls** were made to the Breastfeeding Helpline (an average of more than 5550 calls each month)
- **79% of all calls** were supported
- **558 volunteer breastfeeding counsellors** each gave an **average of 46 hours** over the year to supporting breastfeeding mums, babies and their families (more than 25,668 hours were volunteered in total)
- Most callers waited just over 3 minutes before their call was connected and the average call duration was 15 minutes.

'The advice I received really helped and most importantly someone was able to provide me with some confidence … My counsellor was very nice and not pushy. She asked me what I wanted to do which I appreciated, then provided me with the info and advice I needed to achieve what I wanted.' **Jess**

Top five reasons for calling the Breastfeeding Helpline

- **Sore breasts or nipples 31%**
- **Information on feeding patterns 22%**
- **Reassurance 21%**
- **Concern with low milk supply 18%**
- **Baby refusing the breast 15%**

*Data from the 2021 Breastfeeding Helpline survey. Multiple reasons could be selected.

Breast pump hire

The hire of a hospital-grade breast pump from ABA was part of the breastfeeding journey for more than 1200 mums in 2020–2021.

Breast pump hire is often at the recommendation of NICU/neonatal specialists, hospital midwives, child health nurses and lactation consultants. It can be a tool outside of a hospital environment, to successfully establish breastfeeding in complicated or challenging cases, such as where the baby is struggling or unable to receive enough nutrition. It also respects the health choices of 96% of new mums to want to breastfeed, helping mums to navigate some early-stage barriers.

The majority (47%) of breast pump hires were to boost breastmilk supply and to enable supplementary expressed breastmilk (EBM) to be provided to the infant. Another 31% were for latching and feeding issues. Together, more than 940 mums combatted infant weight losses, remedied birth complications, or guarded against breast trauma through breast pump hire.

> 'The pump was wonderful! It allowed me to provide breastmilk for my baby for much longer than I thought I'd be able to, so I'm really grateful!'
>
> **Tsui, ACT**

Helping
1216
mums reach their breastfeeding goals via breast pump hire

A further 15% of mums hired a pump as they were separated from their baby (in hospital), due to neonatal intensive care treatment, premature birth complications or illness.

Qualified and experienced support for mums using breast pumps is of the utmost importance. The past year has seen the continued growth of commercially influenced breast pump hire and retailing businesses. ABA is proud to provide this practical and impartial support across 120+ regions, to help mums to achieve their breastfeeding goals.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, breast pump hire was highly sought in 2020–2021. Additional health measures were implemented to adhere to COVID-19 restrictions and rules, making breast pump hire seamless and safe for mums and their support people (mothers and/or their partners were the major hirees).

Breastfeeding with ABA Facebook group

The constantly evolving digital landscape means ABA's support services offerings need to stretch beyond traditional methods. An ever-growing social media presence (and increasing audience) has sparked the creation of our Breastfeeding with ABA Facebook Group.

The Facebook group is a space for peer encouragement and support in breastfeeding and parenting. It is open to everyone, but the group is private and admission is granted based on answers to a series of questions. This is to ensure members feel safe and everyone is there for ultimately the same reason – to receive and give breastfeeding and other parenting information, support and guidance.

At the close of 2020-2021, the group had almost 5000 members, an incredible feat for a page that was just over a year old. Besides threads answering breastfeeding questions from mums (and others), content includes fun memes, conversation starters and promotion of ABA's services such as the Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat and mum2mum app, all of which is created and posted by a team of social-media-savvy volunteers.

Local support groups

As Australia's leading provider of breastfeeding education, ABA cherishes the role that local groups play in providing in-person Breastfeeding Education Classes (BECs) and local group meetings. Collectively, in 2020-2021 more than 1752 parents were provided with breastfeeding education (across multiple formats).

The COVID-19 pandemic prohibited groups Australia-wide from running events for at least part of the year, many for months on end. In addition, the ability to schedule, resource and conduct local events was significantly impacted by the mandated restrictions.

While ABA rapidly launched the Breastfeeding Education Live (BEL) workshops and online meetings, the complexity, uncertainty and fear presented by the pandemic undoubtedly impacted participation across all types of events.

At a group level, an astounding 539 high-quality online support events were delivered nationally, sharing knowledge and personal experience right across Australia, while opening up support approaches for geographically isolated mums. In the states significantly impacted by COVID restrictions, these events enjoyed comparable attendance rates, an incredible feat given their rapid launch.

This blended group support approach, amounted to more than 4623 attendances by mums and their support people throughout the year.

Applecross Group, WA

'During the lockdown in Perth last year, the Northern Perth Group moved its focus from face-to-face meetups to online Zoom meetings. Through this they were able to chat with some new mums and members who were adjusting to life as new mums. Although no one could go out they knew they could see a friendly face! After the lockdown when meetings resumed these mums were finally able to come along and meet their ABA Zoom supporters. Some of Northern Perth's counsellors also took the time to individually email counsel mums struggling to breastfeed, which was found invaluable.'

Trainee from Northern Perth Group, WA

Preparing parents and building villages of support

In a year where many of Australia's health and education services for expectant parents were severely impacted, ABA's delivery of parent education remained strong.

ABA prepared 1752 parents for the practicalities of breastfeeding, providing 4595 hours of world-class education to mums and dads and delivered some 154 individual classes. Representing a reduction on previous years, this is still an exceptional achievement given the scope and duration of COVID-19 restrictions. It was only possible due to the selfless dedication and resilience of ABA's qualified educators and ABA's nationally coordinated resources and support.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, ABA's highly popular in-person Breastfeeding Education Classes (BECs) couldn't operate. As a result, new and additional cohorts joined the online Breastfeeding Education Live (BEL) workshops that were adapted from

> 'I was daunted by breastfeeding before birth. [Breastfeeding Education Live] prepared me for the reality of breastfeeding, and it was nice to hear that everyone was having the same doubts.'
>
> **Lucy, VIC**

Preparing parents and building villages of support *continued*

their pre-pandemic purpose in May 2020 to meet the needs of pandemic parents.

The BEL workshops were highly successful, with most sessions fully booked. These were scheduled for every Saturday. Additional midweek evening workshops were also held to meet demand. It is unsurprising that the BEL workshops were exceptionally attractive to expectant parents in Victoria and New South Wales (the two states spending the longest in lockdown), representing 81.6% of all attendees.

As the pandemic wore on, the capacity of our volunteers to donate time reduced and, by December 2020, it was affecting ABA's ability to run BEL workshops. This pinch point was alleviated by increasing workshop capacities by 20% in January, to manage volunteer fatigue.

The BEL format has been well refined during the pandemic, as an effective tool in delivering breastfeeding education where in-person classes are not possible. This is an exceedingly positive outcome from a very challenging year, with potential long-term applications for rural and remote communities, as well as employer groups.

Many of ABA's qualified educators find delivering in-person BECs to be an intensely rewarding experience, driving them to deepen their knowledge and commitment to fuelling ABA's volunteer services. The longer class format enables more personalised support of mums, while also attracting a higher participation rate of dads and partners.

With research highlighting partners' critical role in supporting mums to reach their breastfeeding goals, ABA excitedly looks forward to delivering a blend of in-person and online education services to parents as we transition through the COVID-19 pandemic.

'As a new mum in the pandemic, the breastfeeding live class was great, providing me with all the essential info and support I needed. Even though we couldn't meet face to face, I felt prepared and confident in being able to get us through the tough first few weeks/months. I could spot when my baby was distressed and I really needed a bit of extra help and I knew where to get it mid-pandemic!'

Taylah, Hawkesbury/Nepean Group, NSW

4595+
hours of world-class breastfeeding education for parents

'I joined ABA when I was pregnant last year. I wanted to give myself and my baby the best chance of establishing breastfeeding from the get-go and was lucky enough to receive an ABA membership and BEL via the philanthropic support package for ACT mothers.

I actually did the BEL online with my partner while I was in labour at home! My son arrived in May 2020 and I'm proud that he was exclusively breastfed from birth.

We have had our ups and downs (NICU, nipple shields, perinatal depression and anxiety, going back to work full-time, feeding on demand, expressing and formula, daycare, COVID). He is now 16 months old and still breastfed on demand!'

Merryn, Canberra, ACT

98% of chats on LiveChat supported

Top five reasons for using LiveChat

*2021 survey of LiveChat visitors. Multiple reasons could be selected.

Our service could not be rated more highly ...

- **98%** recommend to others
- **93%** said we exceeded or met their expectations
- **80%** said we helped them to resolve their concerns

And how users felt afterwards ...

- **85%** less worried
- **81%** less stressed
- **80%** felt more confident in their breastfeeding journey

LiveChat

LiveChat is accessed via ABA's website each weeknight 8 pm to 10 pm and each Monday and Friday 12 pm to 2 pm (Victorian time). In 2020-2021, 6313 chats were initiated, with 97 qualified volunteers providing support and information to breastfeeding mothers and their families.

A standout figure was that a third of the mums (33.5%) who used LiveChat in 2020-2021 live in rural Australia and 2.4% live in remote areas, highlighting the service's success in meeting the needs of geographically isolated mums and their families.

In 2020-2021, the LiveChat platform was upgraded to be more mobile friendly, thus ensuring a more seamless journey for mums. Next steps include further improving the experience for mums, via online assistants who can instantaneously link visitors with the latest evidence-based information.

'LiveChat makes it super easy for people (like me) who really struggle with the right words to say when it's about something that I'm totally stressing about. It's SO accessible, I can msg while I'm boobing bub to sleep (and not risk waking her!).' **Stella**

mum2mum app and *Breastfeeding … with ABA* podcast and blog

mum2mum app in 2020-2021

3300+
users every month

3100+
were connected to LiveChat and

1470+
to Helpline via the app

Users loved accessing articles based on their baby's age.

mum2mum app

ABA's free mum2mum app delivers breastfeeding information straight to mums' fingertips, in iOS and Android formats. App subscribers receive premium breastfeeding content tailored to their baby's age and stage of development. Users can also store journal notes and videos; record baby's feeds, nappy changes and sleeps; and browse breastfeeding articles and videos, as well as rapidly access LiveChat and National Breastfeeding Helpline services.

In 2022, the mum2mum app will provide mothers and their families with breastfeeding support and information that is relevant to their geographical location, and will have more video and image content.

Podcast and blog: *Breastfeeding … with ABA*

In 2020-2021, ABA released a new information offering: a podcast and an accompanying blog. *Breastfeeding … with ABA* launched in November 2020 and combines evidence-based information with the lived experience of mums and families in highly popular 20 to 30 minute episodes. The aim is to provide inclusive content that supports mums, and ultimately helps them reach their individual breastfeeding goals.

Podcast in a nutshell: 2020-2021

40,000
plays

10
podcast episodes and growing

- Most listeners are from Australia but others come from the USA, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Ireland, France, Poland and Germany.
- Smash-hit episodes include: 'Early days: what do you need to know?', 'Why is my supply low?', 'Breastfeeding … and sleep', and 'Breastfeeding stories … relactation'.

Impact

The podcast regularly charts highly in the iTunes 'Kids & Family' category and is currently rated 4.8 out of 5. It's shared broadly by members, non-members, midwives and child health nurses across their personal social networks, a key objective in developing the podcast.

Volunteers from across Australia contribute to *Breastfeeding … with ABA*. The episodes in 2020-2021 were produced thanks to 18 co-hosts, 7 guests and the sharing of 9 personal stories about ABA services. Six authors have shared their stories on the accompanying blog, which provides additional and resource-rich content on the same topics as the podcast episodes.

Booklets and website

Booklets

In 2020-2021, ABA overhauled and updated five of our existing booklets:

- *Breastfeeding: and family foods*
- *Breastfeeding: and reflux*
- *Breastfeeding: and your supply*
- *Breastfeeding: when your baby refuses the breast*
- *Breastfeeding: twins, triplets and more*

The top five booklets purchased in 2020-2021 were:

- *Breastfeeding: expressing and storing breastmilk*
- *Breastfeeding: and sleep*
- *Breastfeeding: and your supply*
- *Breastfeeding: an introduction*
- *Breastfeeding: and crying babies*

In total, 626 hard copy booklets were purchased in 2020-2021 compared to 3500 digital downloads. The strong preference for digital booklets highlights the need to keep improving our offerings with the electronic landscape in mind: offering mums and their support people interactive experiences, real-time updates, and engaging photo and video content.

Website

In 2020-2021, the research and information pages of the ABA website were updated for currency. Fifteen pages were significantly updated with the latest information and evidence to meet the needs of today's parents. In addition, 1 new resource article was added: 'Caring for your new baby when there is a "boil water" or "do not drink notice"'.

2020-2021 website highlights

- **A series of 5 videos** on various topics such as tongue-tie, mastitis, sore nipples, among others. These feature the expert knowledge of Dr Lisa Amir, a medical practitioner, lactation consultant and researcher working in breastfeeding medicine.
- Joint infographic with RANZCOG regarding **COVID-19 vaccines and breastfeeding**.
- Working with the Australian Institute of Sport to create **online fact sheets for athletes** of all levels in returning to work after giving birth.

Information for priority audiences

In 2020-2021, ABA launched a collaborative project with Rainbow Families NSW, to provide information and support to LGBTQIA+ families.

Designed and developed by members of the LGBTQIA+ community within both organisations, the resources include a 124-page eBook (available on both ABA and Rainbow Families NSW websites), and an initial series of four lactation classes for expectant parents scheduled for 2021-2022.

The book and classes will provide all the usual introductory breastfeeding information including how lactation works, normal baby behaviour, what to expect in the early days and early weeks, and how to manage common challenges.

They also provide specialist information relating to co-feeding, inducing lactation and relactation, feeding as a transgender or gender-diverse person, as well as social and emotional support in relation to starting a family and seeking support as an LGBTQIA+ parent.

The language and images used throughout the book and in the classes aim to provide a safe, inclusive space for LGBTQIA+ parents to seek out and receive information.

These world-first resources have been warmly received by health professionals.

Volunteer story

Reb Schoates

Reb has been active in ABA since 2013, spending time on the Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat, running local group meetings and piloting the development of groundbreaking new resources for LGBTQIA+ parents and families.

As a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, Reb has previously been involved in providing breastfeeding information to parents at Rainbow Families NSW antenatal classes and presenting at the ABA ACT/NSW Branch Conference on how ABA can support LGBTQIA+ parents.

With the support of Ashley Scott and Bridget Muir from Rainbow Families NSW, along with many ABA volunteers led by Reb and Karleen Gribble, a book and accompanying classes were created by the community, for the community – providing accurate, supportive, evidence-based, peer-to-peer information and education for LGBTQIA+ parents.

Everyone deserves to feel valued, valid and seen. When a mum realises she knows how to follow her baby's cues, when a parent enters a class and sees families just like theirs, when any parent asks for help and support and receives it openly and unconditionally. These are the empowering moments Reb is passionate about.

'We LOVE the simplified English A4 booklets.' **Royal Hospital for Women, Randwick, NSW**

How Breastfeeding Works booklets

The ACT/NSW Branch range of *How Breastfeeding Works* booklets has been expanded to now include the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Nepali, Bengali, Korean, Vietnamese, Karen/Burmese, Turkish, Spanish, Tibetan, Punjabi, Urdu and Indonesian.

The purpose of the booklets is to provide breastfeeding information in languages that reflect the diversity of our community. We consulted with multicultural and disability support officers who recommended that we provide the information in plain language.

The easy English text, spanning 40 pages and accompanied by A4 illustrations, was produced first, before being translated. Within each of the translated booklets, the English language text sits alongside the translated text.

In the past year, 17,804 copies of the booklets have been distributed to health services across ACT and NSW.

'They are awesome and the mothers love them.' **St George Hospital, Kogarah, NSW**

Essence magazine and eNewsletter

Essence magazine

Essence is ABA's flagship publication for members. It is produced 4 times a year and is a collection of informative articles, of first-person accounts from breastfeeding mums to evidence-based information pieces on a range of important topics. Most issues also feature recipes, baby and toddler activity ideas, and popular brelfies from our social media accounts.

In 2020–2021, some of the popular stories included:

- Erin La Porte's raw and touching reflection on motherhood, what it means, and the simultaneous universality and diversity of the experience.
- Reminiscences from long-term members and volunteers to mark the 20th anniversary of our name change to ABA.
- Stacey Carter's inspiring and trailblazing story of her return to work, and the support she received from her workplace and her partner.
- Meghan Sanchez's beautiful story 'My White Couch' about adjusting to and embracing parenthood, and making memories along the way.

6500
copies of *Essence* landed in letterboxes

5000
digital download copies of *Essence* enjoyed online

Member eNewsletter

ABA members receive an eNewsletter every month. Filled with information articles, fact boxes, volunteer profiles, stories from the ABA community, a what's on section, and more, it is one of the main ways we communicate with our community of mums and their support people.

The eNewsletter had a monthly open rate of around 50% in 2020–2021. Next steps include revamping the eNewsletter to include more engaging and interactive content (such as quizzes), more stories and photos from mums, and video content.

Volunteer story

Kathryn Barwick

Essence editor and ABA volunteer since 2016

'When I was on maternity leave and looking for something meaningful and child-friendly to do, I remembered hearing about ABA's training (my sister-in-law was a member and my friend a volunteer). I thought, 'that could do it'. What an understatement that turned out to be. I now wear a few different hats for ABA!

One role I have been proud and humbled to hold is that of *Essence* editor, sharing the heartfelt stories of mums, dads and families, and the latest in research and information. I recently resigned and wish the new editor all the best for her tenure.

I qualified as a breastfeeding counsellor and a community educator in 2017. Since then, I have taken shifts on the National Breastfeeding Helpline almost every month. I love being in that moment and supporting each mum to follow the path that is right for her and her baby. I co-present occasional Breastfeeding Education Live sessions (something I wish I'd attended before having a baby!).

I love being part of this warm, powerful Association and seeing the difference that ABA makes.'

Health Professional Seminars

In 2021, despite the background of regular snap lockdowns across Australia, ABA's annual Health Professional Seminar Series was able to go ahead in a live format. Four venues, in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth, held day-long seminar events, entitled *Breastfeeding: Cues for Success*.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed some challenges for the seminar series, including the closure of international borders restricting access to international speakers, a change of location due to one venue being used as a quarantine hotel, and the inability of interstate speakers to attend in person due to state border closures. The latter was mitigated by Zoom presentations being set up at each venue so that these speakers could still present and answer questions on demand.

880
registrations (live and online)
300
online-only registrations – 26% increase from 2020

'The online format is so easy! It allowed me to actually attend – I'm a shift worker and would have had to take days off to go to the live seminars, as my employer does not support study leave. I was able to listen at my own speed and replay presentations – being able to fully appreciate and understand the content was fantastic.' **Online program attendee**

Despite limitations in acquiring speakers, the 2021 line-up was an impressive cohort of experts working in the fields of lactation, midwifery, neonatology, pharmaceutical studies, biology and psychology. They included: Dr Treasure McGuire, Prof Wendy Ingman, Amanda Donnet, Leila Chirgwin Forde, Dr Karleen Gribble, Prof Jeanine Young, Malvina Walsh, as well as ABA's own Naomi Hull and Dr Susan Tawia.

Delivering face-to-face professional development opportunities for delegates, given that so many were cancelled or transitioned to an online format, was advantageous for ABA's research and education branch. As a contingency, delegates were provided with free access to the webinar program with the purchase of a live program. This proved an effective way of attracting delegates, especially those lacking confidence in committing to in-person events and/or those with an increased familiarity with attending webinars due to the pandemic.

Left: Dr Treasure McGuire presenting 'The role of nutrients and nutrition in the first 1000 days of life' at the 2021 Brisbane seminar

Prof Wendy Ingman presenting 'Mastitis: are we just like cows' at the 2021 Perth Seminar

'I have never attended and not learnt something, even if it's just fine-tuning or adding to what we already know. The bonus is networking and catching up with colleagues you may not have seen in years. It's great fun!' **Midwife and IBCLC attendee at the Perth seminar**

10243NAT Diploma of Breastfeeding Management

In 2020-2021, ABA continued to deliver our world-class 10243NAT Diploma of Breastfeeding Management to health professionals across Australia. Designed to further develop skills and knowledge in lactation support, the Diploma had 18 new enrolments during the year, with six students completing the course.

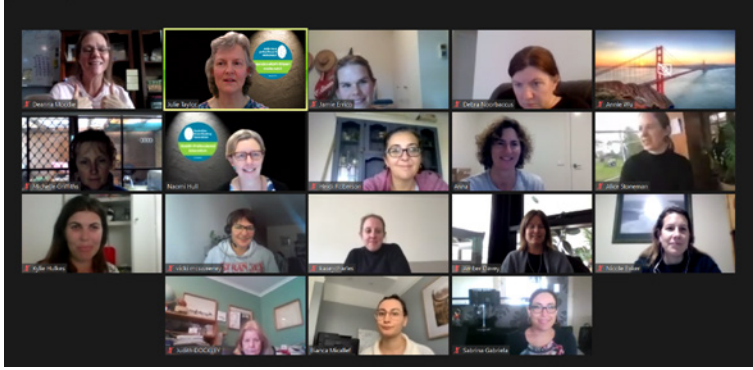
Standalone workshops

Workshops from the 10243NAT Diploma of Breastfeeding Management are also offered as standalone workshops, providing a golden professional development opportunity for health professionals across Australia. Workshops were originally held face-to-face and were exclusively for students enrolled in the diploma course. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic and changing digital landscape, ABA has pivoted to offering these online. Delivering the workshops via Zoom overcomes some of the barriers preventing some health professionals from participating, such as physical location. The workshops are recorded, and participants have access to the footage and other resources for 3 months following the workshop. Participants appreciate the flexibility that online delivery allows, and the opportunity to improve their skills and knowledge while earning professional development points.

Of all attendees, 123 were not enrolled in the diploma course, highlighting the immense benefit of providing access to the standalone workshops for those who cannot commit to the full diploma course. This widens the net of health professionals ABA is able to attract with our bespoke and sought-after education offering.

Guest speakers from ABA and external presenters covered a variety of topics, underscored by evidence-based information and practical tips to assist health professionals in their care of breastfeeding mothers and babies. The most popular workshops, as measured by the highest numbers of attendees, were 'Manage breastfeeding situations and problems', and 'Take lactation histories and conduct breastfeeding assessments'.

'All the activities were very good, there was good flow from one subject to another. It was a very valuable course to review breastfeeding and learn skills and hear others talk about their experiences.'



'As a midwife, I felt this was an awesome refresher with added education built in.'

'Thank you, really enjoyed it and got a lot out of it :) Facilitators were friendly and very approachable.'

11
specialist workshops delivered

206
registrations

eLearning modules and health professional resources

Online modules

ABA's interactive online learning modules delivered via our learning management system (LMS) provide students, health professionals and broader audiences with the latest evidence-based research and information, as well as professional development points upon completion.

From 1-hour lectures to 3 to 5-hour interactive study offerings, the modules cover a range of topics, from more general interest such as 'Finding peace in a pandemic' to specific topics such as 'Structure and function of the breast'. All modules are presented by respected health professionals working in the fields of lactation, nursing and midwifery, public health, and psychology, among others. Many modules are available free of charge.

The two most popular modules were 'Relactation, induced lactation and breastfeeding', with 287 completions, and 'Infant feeding in emergencies', with 196 completions. Due to the popularity of 'Infant feeding in emergencies', a longer and more in-depth module is being produced.

Structure and function of the breast

Finding peace in a pandemic

Fact sheets

Fact sheets are a popular resource on the ABA Professional website. These are fully searchable, downloadable and printable, allowing for ease of use. The website currently has 20 fact sheets, covering a broad range of topics.

In 2020–2021, the following were added:

- COVID-19 and breastfeeding
- Gestational diabetes and breastfeeding
- Tattoos and breastfeeding
- Bed-sharing
- Breastfeeding an infant with Down syndrome

The top five most downloaded fact sheets (1417 downloads in total) were:

- Night-waking of infants and toddlers
- Positioning and attachment
- Low milk supply
- Blocked ducts and mastitis
- Storing and using expressed breastmilk

Breastfeeding Review

Breastfeeding Review, ABA's peer-reviewed academic journal, publishes original research, case studies, reviews, letters, commentaries and discussions. 2020–2021 saw 14 original research papers published from research groups in Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the USA.

Additionally, two papers inquiring into/evaluating ABA services were also published: Vanessa Campbell's research investigating Facebook and relationship-building in a registered charity, and Renee Kam and Nerida Haines's evaluation of the experiences of callers to, and volunteers staffing, the National Breastfeeding Helpline.

ABA services during the dual emergencies of the bushfires and COVID-19 were showcased in Susan Tawia's paper entitled 'The Australian Breastfeeding Association's response to emergencies in 2019 and 2020: Bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic'.

We would like to thank Phillipa Tolmie for the many years she has volunteered as the journal's copy editor, and for mentoring not one but two new volunteers as her replacements in this role.

Live panels and professional website

Live panels

In 2020-2021, the Training and Education team worked with the Breastfeeding Information and Research team to organise live panels on breastfeeding-related topics.

Delivered online via ABA's webinar facility, the panels aim to increase awareness and provide education in an accessible, engaging format, on topics relevant to health professionals, parents and the wider community. Timely and important, the topics ranged from the COVID-19 vaccination, to the WHO Code, to conflict management.

The COVID-19 vaccination live panel was delivered in February 2021, in response to the lack of information about the COVID-19 vaccination for pregnant and breastfeeding women. Presented by Professor Lisa Amir, a medical practitioner and researcher working in breastfeeding medicine at the Royal Women's Hospital in Victoria, the panel was a huge success with 1215 registrations.

In May 2021, the WHO Code panel was delivered to acknowledge and celebrate the 40th anniversary of the WHO Code and its importance to health professionals. The only webinar of its kind in Australia, it had 375 registrations, a solid uptake for a specific interest topic, and an indication of ABA's ability to deliver one-of-a-kind information to niche as well as broader audiences.

A panel discussion at Queensland Branch Conference, May 2021

During a time when most face-to-face education and professional development was halted, ABA's live panels were another way to effectively reach a broad range of people with important health and breastfeeding information.

Professional website

The ABA Professional website is a central repository for health professionals to access world-class resources and professional development opportunities that enable them to engage in best-practice breastfeeding support for mothers and families.

In 2020-2021, ABA gained 44 professional members, making a cumulative total of 633. Members get access to a brand-new feature article every month and can peruse the full back catalogue of our peer-reviewed journal *Breastfeeding Review* at their convenience. There is also an extensive library of research summaries, demonstrating ABA has its finger on the pulse when it comes to the latest research in lactation. Fully downloadable fact sheets on topics related to breastfeeding are available to all users of the website, including members and the wider public.

Other useful resources on the website include global policy explainers and videos to support clinical practice. These sit alongside our one-of-a-kind offering of popular online educational modules.

Although visitors to the site are modest (sitting at around 5000 per quarter), the quality of the traffic is relatively high, meaning users are sticking around once they get to the site. This suggests that they're really delving into the available resources.

Fact sheets tend to be the most popular pages visited, likely due to the fact that they are available to all users of the website. Professional resources also feature in the top 10 most visited pages.

Towards the later part of 2021, the website will undergo a revamp, with the goal of making navigation easier and making the design simpler and more aesthetically pleasing.

Research

The Breastfeeding Information and Research team facilitates research into human lactation and breastfeeding by assisting researchers to recruit participants for their research projects. ABA possesses a significant database of potential research participants. Research assistance can also include posts on ABA's social media platforms, inclusion in branch newsletters and/or permission to approach ABA local support groups directly.

In 2020-2021, ABA approved and provided support for seven external research projects and two ABA research projects to evaluate ABA services: 1) Breastfeeding with ABA, the national Facebook support page, and 2) Australian Breastfeeding Association local groups.

ABA also collaborates with researchers to undertake projects. Collaboration can mean being involved in designing the research and making funding applications, right through to being an author on the final paper.

ABA staff and volunteers formally collaborated with researchers Sam Rowbotham, Leah Marks and Penny Hawe from the Menzies Centre for Health Policy at the University of Sydney to conduct research and publish a paper entitled, 'Using citizen science to engage the public in monitoring workplace breastfeeding support in Australia'.

The ABA and University of Sydney study found:

- **~50%** had no choice but to use unhygienic, communal and/or poorly equipped spaces to express at work (or breastfeed), including toilets/shower cubicles and storage rooms

- **Considerable variation** in the level, type and cultural acceptance of workplace supports

- **Industry or organisation size** did not predict the level of support a breastfeeding mum would receive.

Mary Paton Research Award

The Mary Paton Research Award offers a prize of $5000 for the best original research, original paper or critical review on breastfeeding. It is awarded every two years and honours the founder of the Association, Mary Paton AM.

Throughout 2020 and the first half of 2021, the Award was promoted to Australian health professionals to encourage submissions. Submissions for the 2021 award closed on 30 June 2021, with an outstanding array of original research papers and critical reviews received.

The winning paper will be published in the March 2022 edition of *Breastfeeding Review*.

Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace
An Australian Breastfeeding Association Initiative

Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace program

In 2020-2021, the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace (BFW) program thrived, with a 26% increase in expressions of interest from organisations seeking BFW accreditation as compared to the last 4 years. More excitingly, a quarter of those interested have signed up to become accredited. Although levels of signing up have been similar to previous years, there are positive signs that uptake is increasing.

BFW Customer Satisfaction Survey

In 2021, the first-ever BFW Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) was conducted, with 40 responses received. Findings showed that demand for becoming a breastfeeding friendly workplace is generated by the organisation's priority to create a more family-friendly and gender-equal workplace, which ultimately helps to cement their status as an employer of choice.

The survey also found that the majority of accredited organisations rate the value for money as excellent/good; the BFW toolkits are regarded by the majority as comprehensive, high quality and useful; and the likelihood of our accredited organisations recommending the BFW program is considered great.

'We see great value in achieving the accreditation and using the process to ensure that we are adopting best-practice policy and processes.' **Clayton Utz**

BFW eToolkit launch

After originally creating hardcopy BFW toolkits, comprehensive resources that outline what organisations need to become a breastfeeding friendly workplace, the BFW team developed new and improved BFW eToolkits. These will be released in September 2021 on ABA's online learning management system (LMS). Going digital will not only increase their value, but, importantly, speed up the conversion rate from organisations in progress (currently 24) to becoming accredited. Next steps are including the re-accreditation processes in the eToolkits.

'I believe it promotes an inclusive and supportive message and demonstrates a commitment to equality in the workplace.' **Australasian College for Emergency Medicine**

237,616
total employees reached through BFW-accredited organisations

BFW and COVID-19

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have emphasised the importance of Breastfeeding Policy and Communication plans (this includes HR processes and communication channels) to our accredited organisations, allowing time for breastfeeding and fostering a supportive culture during lockdown and working from home. The BFW program is highlighting that a suitable breastfeeding space or facility is not the only crucial element of BFW accreditation, but that time and support are also essential for supporting breastfeeding employees under the current circumstances.

'Great resources to ensure your organisation is providing the proper support to breastfeeding members.' **Royal Australian Air Force**

Breastfeeding Welcome Here and Baby Care Room Awards

Breastfeeding Welcome Here (BWH)

The Breastfeeding Welcome Here (BWH) initiative was developed to help galvanise community support and raise awareness of breastfeeding in public through the promotion of breastfeeding-friendly venues.

In 2020-2021, work was done to revamp the BWH program in preparation for the launch of ABA's new website in late 2021.

Tasks included: updating the current BWH landing page to make it more user friendly for mums to access and businesses to register, and exploring how to improve the promotion of the program in the future.

Baby Care Room (BCR) Awards

The Baby Care Room (BCR) Awards program aims to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for breastfeeding mothers and carers by recognising venues with suitable breastfeeding and care facilities.

In 2020-2021, work was done to update the BCR program in the context of ABA's new website launch in late 2021. Tasks included: reviewing the BCR criteria, updating the landing page to make it more suitable for mothers and businesses, changing the award system and revamping the certificates.

As updating the BWH and BCR listings is no small task, an audit was conducted that found that extra support is required.

As a result, a new staff member was employed on 23 June 2021 to assist the BWH and BCR working groups.

Professional collaborations and submissions

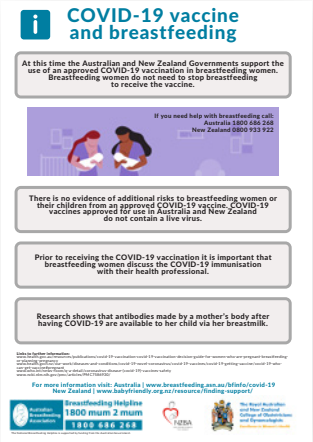
Professional collaborations

In 2020-2021, ABA continued strengthening relationships with numerous organisations that align with our vision and values.

Our ongoing partnership with LifeBlood Milk involves ABA representation on its Advisory Board. Advisory Board members are kept up to date with LifeBlood's work on donor human milk donations and use.

ABA continues to be a member of the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative's (WBTi's) core team and participated in webinars on gender budgeting in breastfeeding hosted by the Australian National University, WBTiAUS and Save The Children.

In collaboration with RANZCOG, ABA created an infographic with the aim of providing reassurance and information to breastfeeding mothers about the COVID-19 vaccination.


COVID-19 vaccine and breastfeeding

At this time the Australian and New Zealand Governments support the use of an approved COVID-19 vaccination in breastfeeding women. Breastfeeding women do not need to stop breastfeeding to receive the vaccine.

If you need help with breastfeeding call:
Australia 1800 686 268
New Zealand 0800 933 922

There is no evidence of additional risks to breastfeeding women or their children from an approved COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia and New Zealand do not contain a live virus.

Prior to receiving the COVID-19 vaccination it is important that breastfeeding women discuss the COVID-19 immunisation with their health professional.

Research shows that antibodies made by a mother's body after having COVID-19 are available to her child via her breastmilk.

Links to further information:
www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-covid-19-vaccination-decision-guide-for-women-who-are-pregnant-breastfeeding-or-trying-to-conceive
www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/vaccination/covid-19-vaccines-covid-19-vaccine-vaccine-covid-19-other-vaccines-and-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding
www.ranzcog.edu.au/Portals/0/Breastfeeding-and-COVID-19-Vaccines-safety
www.ranzcog.edu.au/news/Latest-Articles/PRACTIONERS

For more information visit: Australia | www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/covid-19
New Zealand | www.babyfriendly.org.nz/resource/finding-support/

Breastfeeding Helpline
1800 mum 2 mum
1800 686 268

The Australian Breastfeeding Association is a registered charity in Australia and New Zealand

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

ABA was also engaged by the Australian Institute of Sport Female High Performance Unit to co-create an infographic for elite sportswomen who are returning to work (sport) after giving birth.

An exciting partnership was forged with the School of Midwifery, Nursing and Paramedicine at the Australian Catholic University (Melbourne campus). Joint initiatives to support student midwives include an ABA portal on the university intranet, extensive awareness raising with students of ABA's services, sharing research project topics and engaging students to strengthen their knowledge in the field of lactation.

Submissions

Preparing evidence-led submissions to consultations is critical to ABA's advocacy work. Much of 2020-2021 was spent responding to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC's) consultation to reauthorise the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula: Manufacturers and Importers (MAIF) Agreement.

MAIF Agreement

The MAIF Agreement restricts the advertising of formula for infants aged under 12 months by formula manufacturers and importers who voluntarily agree to be bound by it.

ABA's consultation process with the ACCC began in October 2020. ABA recommended to reauthorise the MAIF Agreement conditional on further amendments that would limit toddler milk advertising, as well as a reauthorisation period of 2 years, countering the 10 years desired by formula manufacturers. In July 2021, the consultation process culminated in the ACCC recommending a reauthorisation period of 3 years. No amendment to include toddler milk drinks was included.

After consultation, the ACCC recommended a reauthorisation period for the MAIF agreement of

3 years

2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines review

The Australian Dietary Guidelines contain recommendations for the diets of infants from 7 months to young children. ABA made recommendations about how to improve this, such as:

- including a statement that continuing breastfeeding into the second year of life and beyond is normal;
- improving the messaging around the introduction of iron-rich foods from 6 months as Australian babies and toddlers are not eating iron-rich foods and many are iron deficient; and
- referring to the resources and support provided by ABA including the National Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat, the mum2mum app and the ABA website.

National Mothering Week 2021: One million mums

Every May in the week that precedes Mother's Day, ABA acknowledges and celebrates mums across Australia and the special role that they play in our lives. National Mothering Week is a valuable opportunity for ABA to cement its status as an essential part of the mothering community and remind the wider public about the importance of providing support to mums.

The timing of this year's National Mothering Week was serendipitous, as it coincided with the 1 millionth call made to the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 5 May. This milestone achievement was a beautiful reminder about just how vital and important it is to support mums, no matter what stage of pregnancy, birth or motherhood they're at.

> 'The mums in our groups often talk about how even though playgroups and ABA meetings are busy with babies crying and kids running around, the mental load is lightened as there is always an extra pair of hands to make a cup of tea for mum, calm a crying baby or find a toddler's long-lost toy.'
>
> **Mary, Group Leader of Darwin-Palmerston and Rural Group**

> 'Being a mother has come with all kinds of new challenges in recent times, particularly being separated from our families and friends interstate, and it's really important to be able to come together to celebrate our achievements and share the challenges during this week of cherishing motherhood.'
>
> **Claire, Breastfeeding Counsellor, TAS Central Coast Group**

The 1 millionth call was taken by one of our qualified volunteer breastfeeding counsellors, Leanne, who has been taking calls on the Breastfeeding Helpline for over 10 years. Besides learning more about people, Leanne credits her tenure at ABA as allowing her to meet and connect with fellow mums in her local area and make lifelong friends.

The excitement of the 1 millionth call pulsated through local group events around the country. In Queensland, the Gladstone Group hosted a free coffee event at a local café with health professionals and new and experienced mothers in attendance.

Gladstone Group, QLD

Darwin-Palmerston and Rural Group, NT

The Hawkesbury/Nepean Group in NSW celebrated with a group meeting on the 'early days of parenting', as well as a dinner at a local Italian restaurant. The Darwin-Palmerston and Rural Group in NT had an outdoor morning meetup, with mums sharing tips about how the care they need changes as our babies grow.

In a Zoom meeting of Tasmanian mums, the discussion centred around how essential a support village is and was peppered with self-care ideas, highlighting how important it is to ensure mums are nurtured.

World Breastfeeding Week 2020: Support breastfeeding for a healthier planet

World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) takes place every year from 1 to 7 August. It is one of the most important weeks in ABA's calendar. It is a golden opportunity to raise awareness among decision-makers, workplaces and the wider community about the importance of breastfeeding and its many benefits.

The WBW theme for 2020 could not have been more pertinent. After devastating bushfires in Australia earlier that year and a pandemic sweeping across our globe, the need to recognise that human health and the health of the planet are deeply connected was more important than ever.

Usually face-to-face WBW events are held all across the country but with Victoria in lockdown and restrictions in other states, local groups had to quickly adapt. The Swan-Mundaring Group, in the foothills of Perth's east, held its annual 'Booby Bake-Off'. Individual cakes rather than large cakes, a COVID-19 twist, were made this year, with the winner an innovative breast-themed take on sushi. For the group's second celebration, mums and kids met up to hide rocks, emblazoned with ABA and WBW logos as well as the Breastfeeding Helpline number, around a local play space.

In other parts of WA, the Wickham Group held a photoshoot of breastfeeding mums and bubs. Meanwhile, Perth's South-Eastern Suburbs Group celebrated by making plant pots for mini succulents using recycled containers, an activity especially appreciated by the little gardeners.

Wickham Group photo shoot, WA

In Toowoomba, Queensland, a copy of *Breastfeeding Management in Australia* was gifted to the Toowoomba Hospital and the Toowoomba Group also celebrated with a mums and bubs WBW-themed morning tea.

Besides local group events and ABA's social media campaign igniting discussion around the sustainability and renewability of breastfeeding for the environment, WBW was likewise an opportunity to highlight the importance of supporting families during COVID-19. The pandemic brought to the forefront the global dimensions of health and our responsibility to keep advocating for a breastfeeding-inclusive society. And it also put a spotlight on just how vital support is to new mums and parents in general. Not having their usual support network can make mums second guess themselves and WBW was the perfect time to remind mums that ABA is always there for them.

Local community education and awareness raising

Despite COVID-19 restrictions, ABA's community education and outreach remained strong, with 187,779 parents across Australia reached and/or engaged with.

ABA's nationally coordinated presentations at, and within, the highly popular Pregnancy, Babies & Children's Expos (PBCE) in most states was essential in maintaining connection with pregnant mums during this pandemic-reshaped year. ABA benefited from PBCE's expertise, resources (and commercial imperative!) to negotiate the many changing COVID-19 restrictions in each state and deliver events in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne. ABA provided some 70,589 mums and dads with information and the opportunity to connect with our services. Our qualified volunteers were the undisputed stars of the show, presenting to thousands of parents in the thrice daily (and often booked-out) workshop sessions. While ABA's unrivalled expertise and reputation in breastfeeding education ensures our place at these high-profile events, it is the methodical coordination of branch office staff and tireless enthusiasm of our volunteers that bring these events to life.

ABA's Tasmania Branch once again provided parenting facilities within the iconic (and exceptionally large) Agfest event, using the booth's prominent placement to engage with 200+ families. The branch also decamped to Ecofest in Ulverstone in April 2021, to target the growing number of sustainability-minded families in the area. Both events promoted Breastfeeding Education Classes and the freshly developed online Breastfeeding Education Live (BEL) workshops, and takeaway information and resources. Combined, these events reached some 61,904 community members, a higher number than any other state!

Western Australia redoubled their localised event participation, in response to their relative isolation from the COVID-19 impacted eastern states. Qualified breastfeeding educators and counsellors attended two multi-day regional fairs, three Perth community events and three baby expo/swap meets (even cannily turning them into branch fundraising opportunities).

Where there were no restrictions about entering schools, ABA was able to normalise breastfeeding to 400+ secondary students via 12 school talks. Similarly, ABA's strong presence within the health network was reinforced with presentations and resources for 280+ health professionals, including to 15 obstetricians where the topic of improving breastfeeding outcomes after caesarean birth was explored. See some expo photos on pages 16 and 17.

Southern Lakes Group volunteers at the Perth Baby and Children's Market in Rockingham, WA

ABA's Tasmania Branch reached some

61,904+

community members at events

Breastfeeding normalised to over

400

secondary students in 12 WA school talks

Local community education and awareness raising *continued*

Groups in Queensland connected with, and resourced some 1016 health professionals, through an array of hospital outreach network meetings, pharmacist educational workshops, and the Darling Downs Women's Health Expo.

At a local level, and with the pandemic restricting the maternal health support options for many mums, local and state governments were quick to acknowledge and fund ABA in educating and supporting pregnant women as they transitioned into motherhood. More than 20 local groups received grants for this purpose, to provide 280+ families with ABA's acclaimed personalised support services, including our BEL workshops and COVID-19 safe and online meetings.

'Magnets and the mum2mum app brochures simply flew off the table at the Rockingham Expo, and trainees were supported to field questions from the constant stream of mums approaching us. Mums left visibly more confident and assured in their breastfeeding journey, with several also keen to train to become a breastfeeding counsellor.'

Monica, Southern Lakes Group, WA

Darwin-Palmerston and Rural Group, NT, volunteers Lex, Mary, Amy and Laura

Groups in Queensland connected with, and resourced, some

1016

health professionals

Queensland Branch volunteer, Mary van Luyn (second from left), on stage at the Pregnancy, Babies & Children's Expo in Brisbane, QLD, February 2021

Thank you

Appeals

ABA's two major fundraisers of the year, the Festive Appeal and the Tax Appeal, were huge successes, despite COVID-19 restrictions continuing, creating unprecedented challenges for the economy. This highlights the unwavering dedication and commitment of ABA's donors and their belief in our work.

The theme for the 2020 Festive Appeal was *Help ABA be there*. It drew attention to the ways that ABA has been here for Australian families in what was an incredibly challenging year for expectant and new parents. On Christmas Day in 2020 alone, there were 51 calls to the Breastfeeding Helpline, a slight increase from the 2018 and 2019 figures. The 2020 Festive Appeal raised $23,130, an increase of 72% from the previous year.

When ABA reached the milestone of 1 million calls to its Breastfeeding Helpline on 5 May, the theme for the Tax Appeal, planned to begin just a few weeks later, was a no-brainer. The 2021 Tax Appeal's theme *One million more* highlighted just how vital ABA's services (such as the Breastfeeding Helpline) are and the importance of their preservation and growth to reach millions more mums around the country.

A total of $51,736 was raised, an increase of 33% from the previous year. The most exciting aspect was that around a third of the supporters were contributing to the Tax Appeal for the first time. Nurturing this growing cohort will be a focus of fundraising activity going forward.

We want to extend our gratitude to all our donors whose continued support of ABA means that we can help even more of Australia's mums to achieve their breastfeeding goals and feel part of a village as they navigate motherhood.

Corporate supporters

ABA has been supported in our support of Australia's mums and families by a select group of corporate partners who are proudly WHO Code-compliant and subject to our stringent evidence-based assessment. ABA is delighted to continue our association with ARDO Medical (Laborie OB), as our Technology Support Partner, as well as Warmth Network partners Ameda (Midmed) and My Brest Friend (Dale Group International). We worked collaboratively throughout the year with our promotional parenting partner, the Pregnancy, Babies & Children's Expo, and welcomed Lenny Rose Active as a Warmth Network Partner, endorsing their Ultimate Nursing Bra.

Of note is ARDO Medical's multi-faceted support of ABA. In addition to supporting breastfeeding mums who require (and hire) ARDO's hospital-grade breast pumps through their local ABA group, both the ARDO Carum and Calypso breast pumps (for purchase) have been independently assessed and endorsed by ABA. We are deeply appreciative of ARDO Medical's Major Partner support to deliver ABA's 2021 Health Professional Seminar Series and their commitment to quality breastfeeding research via their sponsorship of the Mary Paton Research Award in 2021.

Images

We thank the following photographers and contributors for the use of their images in this report.

James Courtney cover, pages 2, 8, 11, 22 and 37 (lower)
Head First Birth Photography page 14
Papillon Studio page 15 (top)
Mary van Luyn pages 15 (lower) and 32
Monica Spillman pages 17 (top) and 39
Jessica Edquist page 17 (lowest)
Leanne page 18 (bottom left) **Paris D** page 18 (top right)
Nicole Donaldson page 19 **Yvette O'Dowd** page 20
Alisya Johar page 21 **Lauren Threadgate** page 24
Rebecca Connolly page 25 **Amy Pervu** page 38 (top right)
Mary Peterson page 40 (left)

Australian Breastfeeding Association