



Australian  
Breastfeeding  
Association



# Here for the journey

Building a breastfeeding-inclusive  
Australia for every mum, parent and baby

Strategic plan 2026–2030

# Executive summary

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Every mother and parent deserves to feel supported, confident, and informed when feeding their baby. Over the next four years, the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) will be here for the journey, providing trusted, timely peer support to reach more families, strengthening breastfeeding-inclusive systems, and ensuring that our volunteers and staff are well supported to do their best work.

## Our purpose

ABA's vision is for breastfeeding to be recognised as important by all Australians and to be culturally normal. As Australia's leading authority on breastfeeding, our mission is to support, educate, and advocate for a breastfeeding-inclusive society. Everything in this plan is guided by our values of inclusivity, respect, reliability, and ethical practice.

## Why this plan matters

Australians are navigating parenthood in a time of significant change. Health systems are under pressure, reliable breastfeeding support can be hard to access, and mothers and parents are often overwhelmed by conflicting information. Many mothers want to breastfeed for longer but do not receive the support they need once they leave hospital or return to work. At the same time, communities are more diverse, volunteering is changing, and digital services are becoming central to how families seek help.

ABA's 2026–2030 strategic plan, *Here for the journey*, responds to these realities. It sets a clear direction for how we will support more parents, reduce inequities, and strengthen the systems that shape breastfeeding experiences, while staying true to our mother-to-mother, peer-led approach.

## Our strategic focus

The plan is built around four connected pillars that describe how we will create change.

**Reaching more parents** focuses on ensuring that all mothers and parents can access trusted, compassionate breastfeeding support when and how they need it. ABA will continue our core in-person and Helpline counselling, grow antenatal education, and help parents connect with their local 'village'.





We will strengthen our partnerships with health professionals and services so more women are supported from pregnancy, and we will embed accessibility, translation, and inclusion across all platforms—particularly for priority communities.

**Championing change** recognises that breastfeeding outcomes are shaped not only by individual effort, but by workplaces, health systems, policies, and social attitudes. ABA will continue to educate health professionals, resource organisations and businesses, and advocate with governments to improve breastfeeding information, services, and support. We will build cross-sector alliances to create lasting, system-level change for mothers, parents, and babies.

**Empowering our people** places volunteers, trainees, and staff at the heart of our impact. ABA's peer-support model is a celebrated strength, and this plan commits to valuing, developing, and supporting all our people. We will continue to invest in volunteer recruitment, training, leadership development, flexible volunteering pathways, and succession planning, while broadening cultural diversity so our workforce better reflects the communities we serve. A strong, supported, and connected team enables better outcomes for families.

**Enabling impact** is about building the foundations that allow ABA to thrive. We will strengthen our evidence base, listen closely to the lived experiences of mothers and parents, and build a vibrant, inclusive membership community. To remain sustainable, we will diversify funding, modernise our systems, and invest in seamless digital infrastructure. We will also respond thoughtfully to the opportunities and challenges presented by emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, taking a values-led approach that keeps human connection at the centre of our support.

### How we will work

This strategy reflects the voices of volunteers, members, staff, and partners from across Australia. It is grounded in evidence, guided by compassion, and shaped by lived experience. ABA will work collaboratively with mothers, families, communities, health professionals, and decision-makers to deliver this plan, adapting as we learn and remaining accountable for our impact.

### Looking ahead

By 2030, ABA aims to support more parents than ever before, reduce barriers to breastfeeding support, and contribute to a society where breastfeeding is understood, valued, and protected. This plan is our commitment to being here for the journey, for mothers, parents and families, for our volunteers, and for a breastfeeding-inclusive Australia.

Warmly,

Cate Uhe  
National President

Victoria Marshall-Cerins  
Executive Officer

Australian Breastfeeding Association



# ABA's strategic framework



## Our Vision

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



## Our Mission

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

## In all we do, we aspire to be:

- Inclusive and Supportive
- Respectful and Accepting
  - Ethical and Trusted
- Skilled and Influential

## Our organisation values:

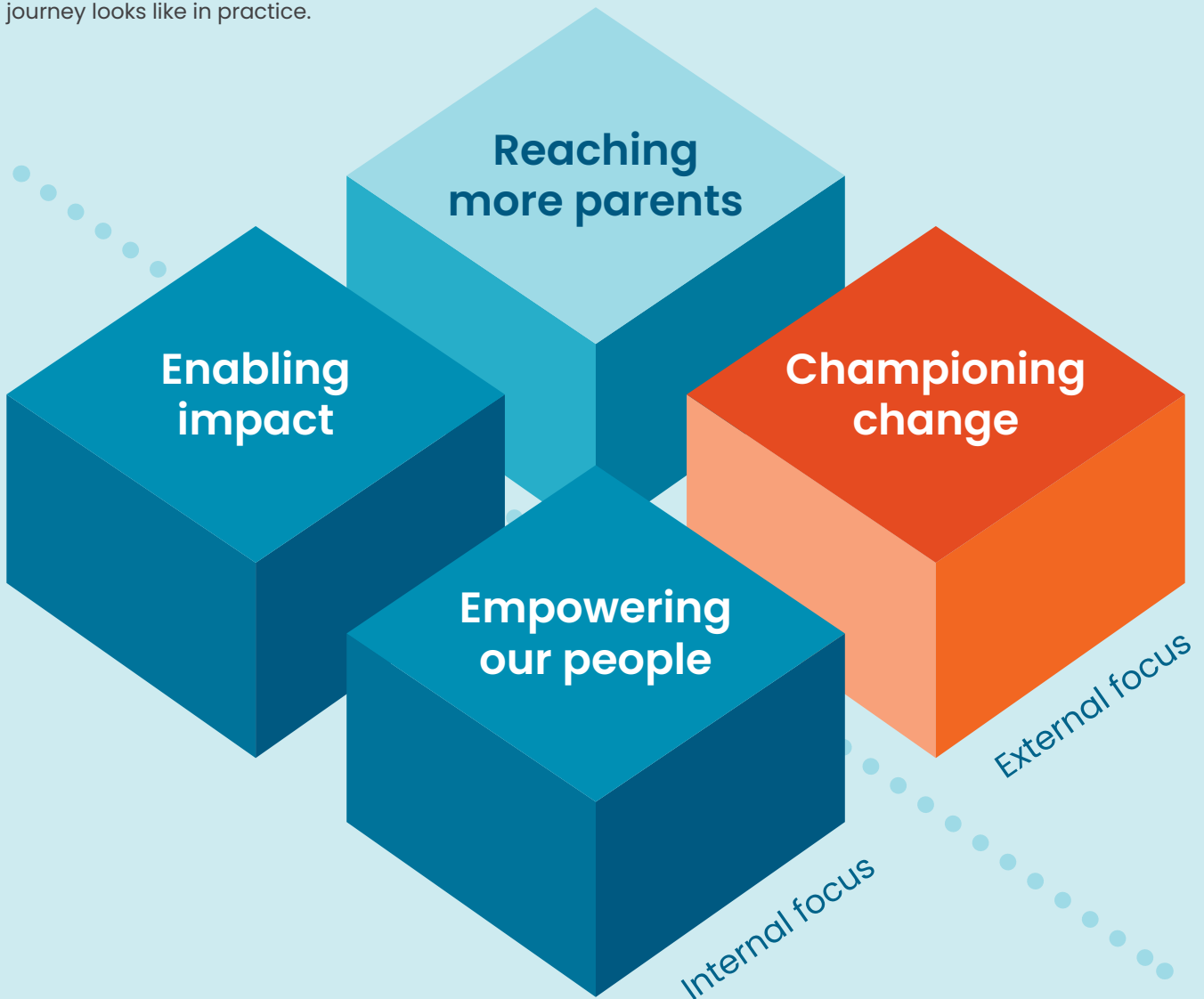
- Volunteering and the contribution of all our people
  - Peer support
  - Community
- Excellence and innovation in breastfeeding support
  - Honesty and integrity
- Effective communication and respectful relationships

## Our strategic priorities for 2026–2030

ABA's 2026–2030 strategy was developed through an extensive 18-month long, participatory process involving volunteers, staff, members and partners.

The strategic framework sets a clear direction for how we will support the diverse journeys of parents, from pregnancy and into the early years of parenting, strengthen breastfeeding-inclusive systems, and sustain the volunteer-led model that has defined our work for decades.

The framework responds to the rapidly changing environment that parents find themselves in. Australia's communities are growing more diverse, volunteering is changing, and digital services are reshaping how mothers and parents seek help. This plan meets those realities with clarity, ambition, and a commitment to what matters most: every mother and parent supported to achieve their breastfeeding goals. This is what being here for the journey looks like in practice.



# Reaching more parents

We aim to support and empower all mothers and parents to achieve their breastfeeding goals. We will place the lived experience of parents at the centre of everything we do, backed by quality evidence, to provide inclusive and accessible breastfeeding education, information and support. We will increase our reach to parents and families through health professional partnerships and collaborations.

## We will:



Provide trusted, in-person breastfeeding counselling and information



Enable parents to connect and build their 'local village'



Expand our antenatal education in the community and online



Increase the visibility of ABA's compassionate, trusted and inclusive brand



Build strategic partnerships with health systems to reach more new and expectant parents



Offer easy to use, seamless, mobile-first support, content and services



Embed translation, accessibility and inclusivity of communications and information across all platforms



Increase our reach to diverse, priority communities through delivery of co-designed, accessible, culturally safe services



# Championing change

We will champion improvements to the experiences of breastfeeding for all mothers and parents in Australia, by educating health professionals and advocating with business, community and government.

## We will:



Engage, educate and resource health workers and health services to support best practice in breastfeeding management



Educate and resource businesses, organisations and the public to meet the needs of breastfeeding women and babies



Collaborate and build cross-sector alliances to achieve our goals



Campaign to government for improvements in the information, support, and services for breastfeeding mothers, parents and their families



# Empowering our people

Our people are central to our impact. By fostering a cohesive culture of transparency, belonging, and recognition, we'll build a thriving workforce that supports, educates, and advocates for a breastfeeding-inclusive society.

## We will:



Value and recognise the contributions of all our people – our volunteers, staff and trainees



Increase the support, upskilling and development of our people and promote wellbeing and teamwork



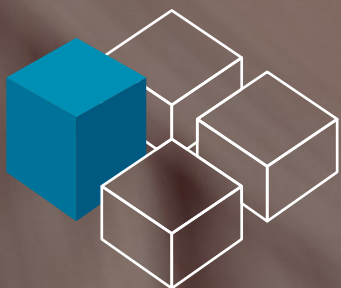
Further develop ABA's volunteer opportunities to include new flexible and short-term roles that meet diverse need and interest



Ensure the sustainability of ABA's volunteer model and embed development and succession planning within volunteer leadership roles



Attract and retain a diverse and culturally sensitive volunteer team that reflects the multicultural Australian community



# Enabling impact

To achieve our bold strategy, we need strong foundations. We will strengthen the organisational infrastructure, systems, and capabilities that enable our volunteers and staff to deliver exceptional support, drive meaningful change, and sustain our impact for the long term.

## We will:



Maintain a thorough understanding of the diverse perspectives of breastfeeding mothers, parents and families, underpinned by quality scientific evidence



Build an active and inclusive ABA membership community



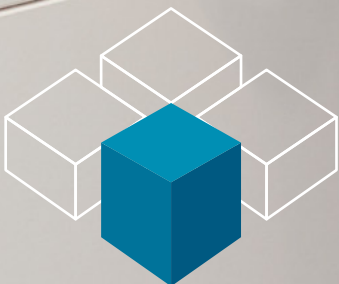
Build a seamless and modern technology infrastructure at the heart of our operations



Respond to the opportunities and address the challenges presented by the growth of AI



Ensure our sustainability through increasing and diversifying our funding streams



# Forces shaping our future

ABA supports families in a world that is changing quickly. Breastfeeding is well recognised in Australia as critically important for the health of babies and mothers. It is strongly supported in national policies such as the *Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy: 2019 and beyond*,<sup>1</sup> the *National Women's Health Strategy*,<sup>2</sup> the *National Preventive Health Strategy*,<sup>3</sup> and the *National Obesity Strategy*.<sup>4</sup>

In Australia, most women (96%) start breastfeeding when their baby is born. However, after leaving hospital, many stop sooner than they planned<sup>5</sup> due to lack of support from health services, employers, or their community.<sup>1</sup> Birth experiences also play a role here, with one in three women experiencing birth trauma. Difficult births can impact confidence, recovery, and breastfeeding.<sup>6</sup> ABA's peer support model plays a key role in providing new mothers with timely, compassionate, and practical breastfeeding support when other parts of the system cannot.

## Women's health, equity, and inclusion

Women's health is currently receiving more attention, and there is a growing understanding that supporting women's health benefits families,

workplaces, and the wider economy. Breastfeeding support enables women to achieve their breastfeeding goals, combine breastfeeding and work, and feel confident in their choices. However, not all families have equal access. Some face extra barriers due to cost, culture, location, health needs, and language. ABA works to reduce these barriers by offering inclusive, culturally safe, and flexible support so more families can reach their breastfeeding goals.

ABA champions an 'Informed is best' approach. We recognise parents' right to clear, evidence-based information about feeding options, risks, and support—without pressure, judgement or commercial influence—so families can make confident decisions that are right for them and their babies.



## Volunteers, workforce, and sustainability

Many people, especially women, now have less time due to work pressures, caring roles, and cost-of-living stress. As a result, people are also looking for volunteer roles that are flexible, meaningful, and well supported.<sup>7</sup>

ABA's volunteer model is a powerful expression of community, where parents support each other freely and with care. ABA volunteers provide families with empathetic, authentic support, bringing lived experience, empathy, care, and dedication. ABA must respond to the changes impacting volunteer to ensure the sustainability of the volunteer team into the future.

Changes in the employment landscape also affect ABA's ability to attract and retain both staff and volunteers. Supporting wellbeing, skills, and retention across the whole workforce is essential for the Association's long-term sustainability.

## The growth of AI

Over the next five years, artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to play a bigger role in digital health information and support services. AI may help people access information more quickly, and personalise content, reducing pressure on health services. However, AI systems can reflect bias in the data they use, provide inaccurate or misleading information, and raise concerns about privacy, consent, and trust.<sup>8</sup> For ABA, human oversight will remain essential. A values led approach—where AI supports people rather than replaces mother-to-mother support—will be critical to ensuring digital breastfeeding information services remain safe, evidence-based, and trustworthy.

## Looking ahead

From 2026 to 2030, there is a strong opportunity for ABA as a trusted national leader in breastfeeding support within a strained health system. At the same time, the Association must strengthen sustainability in a competitive environment with limited resources.

Being here for the journey will require clear priorities, strong partnerships, ongoing investment in people and systems, and continued alignment with national women's health and volunteering goals—all while keeping breastfeeding women and babies at the centre of everything we do.



# ABA's theory of change

ABA exists to make it possible for every mother, parent and family to achieve their breastfeeding goals whatever they may be, and for babies to access their right to breastfeed or receive human milk. ABA's theory of change is grounded in the understanding that breastfeeding outcomes are shaped not only by individual knowledge and confidence, but also by the wider social, cultural, policy and service environments in which families live.<sup>1,9,10</sup>

When families including those from priority communities receive timely, evidence-based and culturally safe antenatal breastfeeding education and breastfeeding peer support, through services such as ABA's Breastfeeding Education Classes,<sup>11</sup> National Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat, community breastfeeding peer support and Virtual Village, then mothers and parents will experience increased confidence, self-efficacy and capacity to initiate breastfeeding and manage challenges.<sup>12,13</sup> This leads to higher rates of breastfeeding exclusivity and duration to 12 months and beyond, in line with the Australian Infant Feeding Guidelines, through key critical milestones including the first 72 hours, the introduction of solid foods and returning to work.<sup>1,14</sup>

When health professionals receive high-quality, evidence-based, ongoing breastfeeding education that is free from commercial influence, through learning experiences such as ABA's Diploma of Breastfeeding Management, Health Professional Seminar Series, and eLearning modules, then they will be better prepared to provide families with consistent, timely and effective care across the breastfeeding continuum.<sup>15</sup> This strengthens parents' trust in services and reduces avoidable breastfeeding cessation.<sup>16</sup>

When communities, workplaces and public spaces actively welcome and support breastfeeding through initiatives such as ABA's Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces, Breastfeeding Welcome Everywhere, and





### What is 'theory of change' and why is it important?

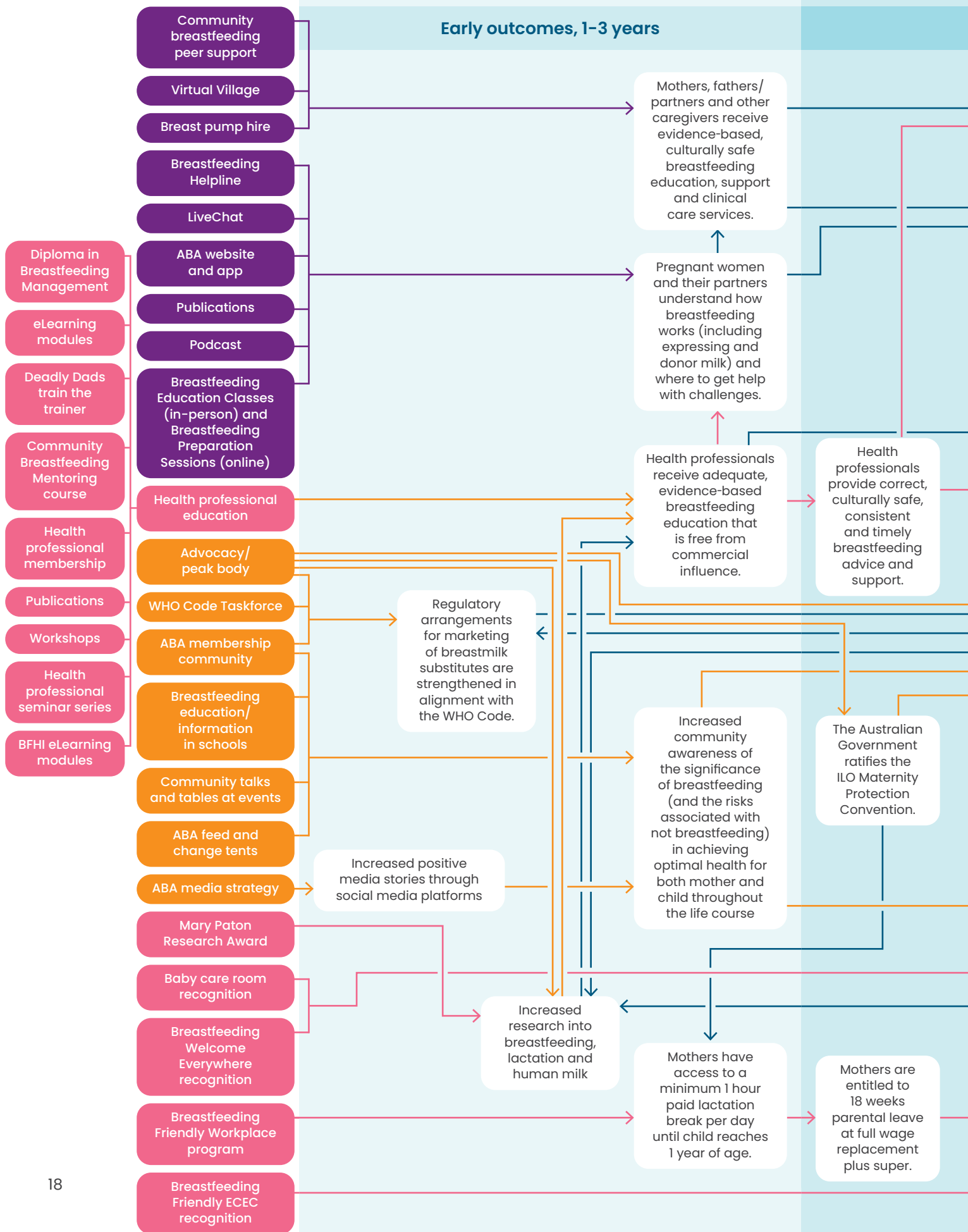
A theory of change is a planning tool that explains how and why an organisation's work is expected to lead to meaningful change. Rather than simply describing what an organisation does, it maps the connection between activities, the conditions those activities create, and the near-, mid- and long-term outcomes they are intended to produce. This makes the logic of an organisation's work visible, testable, and easier to communicate to partners, funders, and communities.

Early Childhood Education and Care recognition then breastfeeding becomes visible, normalised and socially supported. In parallel, when advocacy efforts enable governments to strengthen regulatory frameworks aligned with the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes 1981 and subsequent WHA resolutions and counter inappropriate marketing of breastmilk substitutes, then breastfeeding is protected and parents are better able to make informed feeding decisions free from commercial influence.<sup>17,18</sup>

Together, these individual, setting-based and structural enablers contribute to midterm outcomes of increased breastfeeding exclusivity and duration, positive public sentiment, and more equitable access to breastfeeding support, particularly for priority populations.<sup>19</sup> Over the long term, ABA's advocacy work supports the Australian Government's ratification of the International Labour Organisation's Maternity Protection Convention and the full implementation of the *Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2019 and beyond*. These advocacy goals contribute to improved health and wellbeing for babies and mothers across the life course, and to a society that values breastfeeding as a shared public good, rather than an individual responsibility.<sup>14,20</sup>

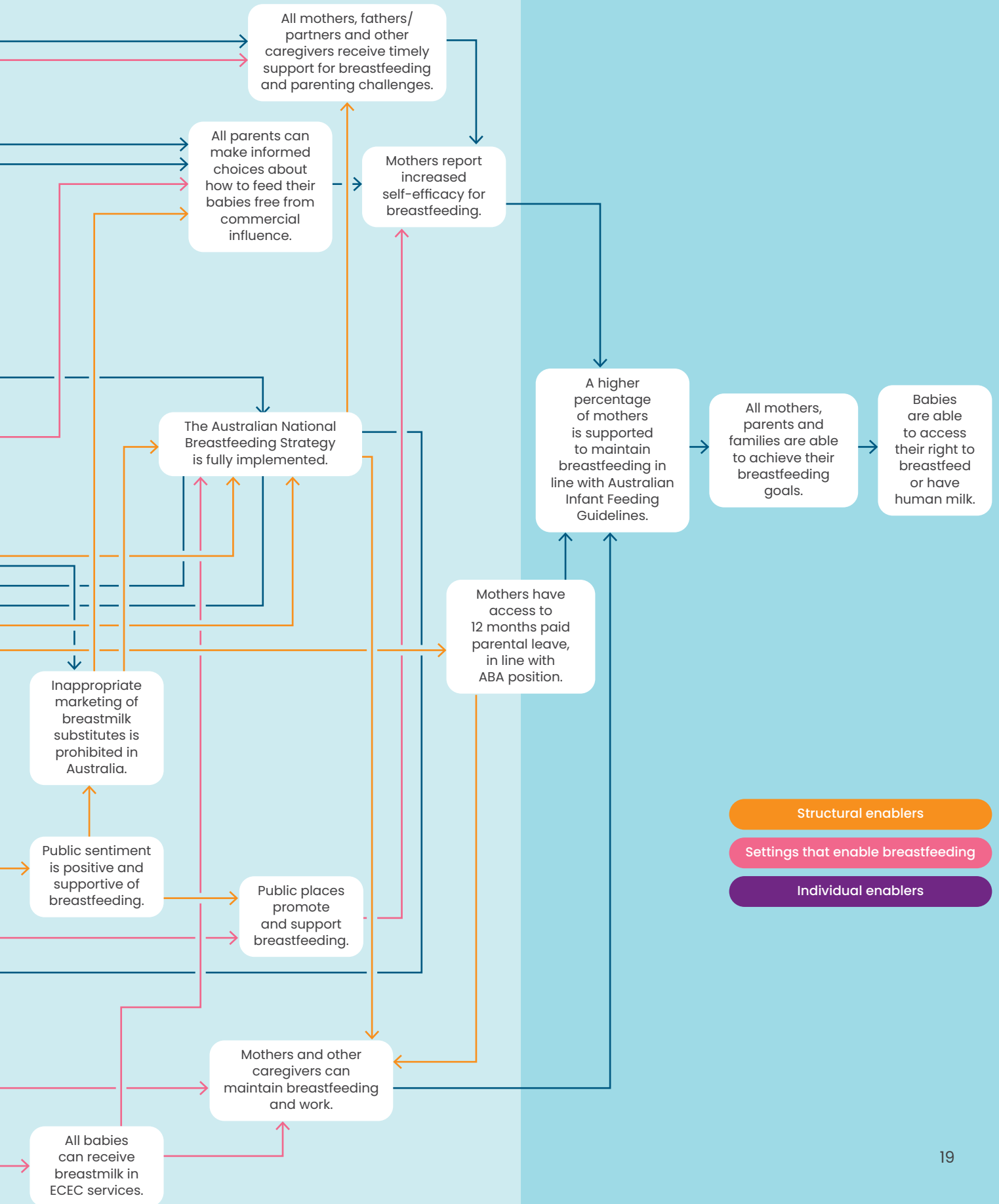


# ABA's outcomes framework



Mid-term outcomes, 4-7 years

Long-term outcomes, 8-10 years



# How we developed ABA's 2026–2030 strategic plan



Our strategic planning process was designed to honour ABA's strong volunteer-led heritage and the changing contemporary volunteering landscape while responding realistically to the evolving needs of breastfeeding women and their families.

Our evidence-base combined quantitative data, qualitative insight, and lived experience. We focused on understanding both what must change and what must be protected as core to our identity.

## A participatory and evidence-based process

From early 2025 through to mid-2026, we engaged with the ABA community of volunteers, staff, partners and members through a structured series of activities:

- **Organisation-wide strategic framework development**, using the SWOT analysis methodology combined with Appreciative Inquiry we explored where ABA is at its best and where it has the greatest potential for impact.
- **Deep dive focus groups**, convened around critical strategic themes from the SWOT analysis activities including 'Improving our services', 'How others see us', 'Better technology', 'Funding and business planning', and 'Supporting volunteers'. These sessions brought together volunteers and staff to test assumptions, surface tensions and explore future-focused solutions.
- **Review of internal and external data**, including service usage data, member and volunteer feedback, evaluations, and external research on maternal and infant health trends.
- **Synthesis and sense-making**, where early directions and initial drafts were socialised at branch conferences and national forums within the Association to inform strategic choices, build shared ownership and clarity of purpose.

## What we heard: key strategic insights

Across the many conference sessions, deep dive groups, member surveys and webinar consultations, several consistent and interconnected themes emerged. These insights have directly shaped the strategic priorities and directions set out in this plan.

### 1. Mothers' needs and support seeking behaviours are changing

ABA community members consistently highlighted that mothers and parents now expect **instant, mobile-first support**, often turning to phones, text-based communication, social media and AI tools. While ABA's community-based and telehealth services remain highly valued, the way mothers and parents want to access support has shifted significantly. The implication is clear: ABA must lead confidently in digital service delivery while preserving the empathy and trust that define mother-to-mother peer support.

### 2. ABA's services are deeply trusted and could reach more parents

Throughout our planning process, ABA's reputation for evidence-based, compassionate support were continuously affirmed. ABA community members also highlighted that we need to do more to reach families who need our support, particularly those from diverse populations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Priorities should include continuing to modernise resources, address online user experience challenges and increase ABA's visibility in digital search environments.

### 3. Volunteers are ABA's greatest strength

Across consultation processes, the sustainability of ABA's volunteer model emerged as a key focus. ABA volunteers are deeply committed and highly skilled, yet many are managing a complex and

demanding juggle between their volunteering and other life priorities. ABA volunteers emphasised the need for more flexible, diverse and digitally enabled pathways that make it easier to contribute meaningfully whilst balancing other commitments.

### 4. Leadership, inclusion and diversity are central to ABA's sustainability

ABA volunteers stressed the importance of simplifying leadership structures, actively nurturing new and emerging volunteer leaders, and ensuring leadership opportunities are accessible to all volunteers. Building a more diverse volunteer base that reflects the communities ABA serves was seen as an equity imperative and essential to relevance, credibility and impact.

### 5. Opportunities exist to strengthen ABA's strategic positioning and communications

ABA community members also surfaced questions about ABA's future scope and positioning. Participants expressed strong support for ABA's core purpose in breastfeeding peer support, while also acknowledging the importance of reaching pregnant women and their support people to support preparation for breastfeeding and parenting. There was a clear call for ABA to clearly articulate our compassionate and trustworthy brand which is gentle with women and inclusive of diverse journeys, whilst being strong in our advocacy on their behalf with health professionals, workplaces and governments.

## From insight to direction

Taken together, these findings point to a clear strategic opportunity for the Association: **ongoing modernisation and impact growth whilst retaining the heart of who we are.**

ABA's strategy is grounded in the understanding that breastfeeding outcomes are shaped not only by individual knowledge and confidence, but by the wider social, cultural, policy and service environments in which families live.

The 2026–2030 strategic plan responds directly to what we heard through the strategic planning process. It prioritises inclusive and digitally-enabled services, sustainable community peer support, modern volunteer models, and a renewed focus

on ABA's unique role as the national peak body for breastfeeding support. In doing so, it reflects not only the changing world around us, but the collective wisdom, experience and commitment of the ABA community itself.

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Image on page 16 courtesy of Joni Simone Photography

# Join us

If you share ABA's vision of a breastfeeding-inclusive society and want to support breastfeeding women, parents and families, please join us.

## Become a Friend of ABA

Friends of ABA members are essential to the Association's long-term sustainability, through their role in providing word-of-mouth promotion and financial support. Membership fees help fund ABA's breastfeeding education, advocacy, publications and community services. Plus, you benefit from discounts and free resources. [breastfeeding.asn.au/friends-aba-membership](https://breastfeeding.asn.au/friends-aba-membership)

## Volunteer with ABA

Perhaps you have been supported in your own breastfeeding journey and want to give something back. Maybe you are passionate about promoting breastfeeding. You might be looking to develop new skills and make new friends. Whatever your reason, ABA welcomes you. [breastfeeding.asn.au/volunteering](https://breastfeeding.asn.au/volunteering)

## Become a volunteer ABA Breastfeeding Counsellor or Educator

Volunteer on ABA's 24/7 Breastfeeding Helpline or LiveChat services or offer local group activities or online webinars. ABA offers a sponsored volunteer traineeship that includes a nationally accredited Certificate IV qualification. We'd love for you to be involved. [breastfeeding.asn.au/volunteering/breastfeeding-counsellor-educator](https://breastfeeding.asn.au/volunteering/breastfeeding-counsellor-educator)

## Support us to continue to be here for the journey

ABA relies on partners and donors to enable us to achieve our vision of a breastfeeding-friendly society. Please contact us for more information about how you or your organisation can support ABA to empower mothers and parents to achieve their breastfeeding goals. Reach us at [info@breastfeeding.asn.au](mailto:info@breastfeeding.asn.au)



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Jun 2026