



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World Breastfeeding Week 2026: strong formula marketing laws could help more Australian families reach their breastfeeding goals

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) is using World Breastfeeding Week 2026 to highlight a simple but powerful message: breastfeeding is a sustainable first-food system — but families need fair access to trusted support and protection from commercial influence.

World Breastfeeding Week runs from 1–7 August, with this year's global theme focused on nutrition, food security and poverty reduction. In Australia, ABA says the theme has a clear local meaning: strengthen what already works, support families earlier and more equitably, and protect parents' infant feeding decisions from inappropriate formula marketing.

Ninety-six per cent of Australian mothers start out breastfeeding their baby, one of the highest initiation rates in the world. But by six months, only around a third are still exclusively breastfeeding. ABA says this gap between intention and outcome shows that Australian families do not lack motivation — they need stronger support systems and better protection from the commercial pressures that can undermine breastfeeding confidence.

"Most Australian mothers want to breastfeed, but breastfeeding is not sustained by intention alone," said Ms Victoria Marshall-Cerins, Executive Officer of the Australian Breastfeeding Association. "Families need trusted, practical support when challenges arise, and they need infant feeding information that is free from commercial influence."

"This World Breastfeeding Week, we are saying: strengthen what works. ABA's National Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat, local groups, evidence-based resources and trained volunteers already provide practical, low-barrier support to families across Australia. But families also need policy settings that protect breastfeeding from marketing practices designed to shape feeding decisions."

Breastfeeding supports nutrition, food security and family budgets

ABA says breastfeeding should be recognised as a sustainable first-food system that supports infant nutrition, family budgets, public health, emergency resilience and environmental sustainability where breastfeeding is possible and supported.

Breastmilk is a biologically adaptive first food that changes as babies grow and supports infant nutrition and development. Breastfeeding can also reduce some avoidable household costs and support food security by providing a locally available food source that does not require ongoing purchase, preparation equipment, packaging, transport or storage.

ABA says these benefits are particularly important during cost-of-living pressures and during emergencies or disruptions, when access to clean water, electricity, heating, refrigeration or safe preparation spaces may be limited.

Ms Marshall-Cerins said, "Breastfeeding requires time, care, skilled help and a community that values breastfeeding. When families can access the support they need, breastfeeding can reduce avoidable costs for households and health systems, while giving babies a strong nutritional start."

Formula marketing is a barrier families should not have to face

ABA is congratulating the Federal Government on progressing new legislation to restrict the marketing of infant formula in Australia, following the lapse of the voluntary MAIF Agreement in February 2025.

ABA says this is a genuine opportunity to remove one of the most significant barriers between Australian families and their breastfeeding goals — but only if the new laws are strong, comprehensive and aligned with

the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions.

The Government has indicated the new legislation will cover, at a minimum, the scope of the former MAIF Agreement, which applied only to manufacturers and importers and only to standard infant formula. ABA says three gaps must be closed if the legislation is to genuinely support families:

- Retailers must be covered, not just manufacturers and importers. In-store price promotion, shelf placement, loyalty programs and retailer-run advertising are significant marketing channels.
 - Toddler milks, follow-on formula and brand-extension tactics must be brought into scope. These products can be used to build brand loyalty and cross-promote infant formula, even when direct infant formula advertising is restricted.
 - Health professionals and health systems must be protected from commercial influence. Families need infant feeding advice that is evidence-based, commercially independent and free from sponsorship or marketing pressure.

"Formula products should be available when needed, and families who use formula should be supported with safe, factual information," Ms Marshall-Cerins said. "But marketing is different. Marketing is designed to influence choices, build brand loyalty and normalise the use of formula products in ways that can undermine breastfeeding confidence."

"Strong regulation should protect parents, caregivers, health professionals and health systems from inappropriate commercial influence across retail, digital, health-professional, sponsorship and brand-extension channels."

Strengthening what already works

ABA says World Breastfeeding Week is also an opportunity to celebrate the practical support already working for families across Australia.

"Strengthening what works means making sure families know where to turn before breastfeeding challenges become overwhelming," Ms Marshall-Cerins said. "It also means supporting health professionals and community services to connect families with trusted, commercially independent breastfeeding support."

"This is especially important in the early days and weeks, when parents may be tired, uncertain and vulnerable to marketing messages that suggest formula is easier, safer or equivalent to breastfeeding support."

Families' stories show why timely support matters

Fotini, mum to a 6-month-old and a four-and-a-half-year-old, found ABA classes helpful during pregnancy and early parenting.

"ABA classes were really good, especially the amount of information and type of information that was presented to help prepare mums. ABA has so many avenues to get support," Fotini said.

Maddie turned to ABA's website and Helpline when she had a newborn and needed practical information.

"In the early days we had trouble latching, so I found a lot of information on the ABA website. I also called the Helpline. It is amazing to have this service available. Attending a local group also helped me," Maddie said.

Ms Marshall-Cerins said stories like Fotini's and Maddie's show why trusted support needs to be visible, accessible and protected from commercial influence.

"Breastfeeding is a journey that thrives with ongoing, accessible and inclusive support," she said. "When parents can find practical help early, they are more likely to feel confident and supported to meet their own breastfeeding goals."

ABA's World Breastfeeding Week call to action

This World Breastfeeding Week, ABA is calling on:

- parents and families to connect with trusted breastfeeding information and support through ABA
- health professionals to refer families to ABA's National Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat, local groups and evidence-based resources
- members, volunteers and supporters to share WBW26 campaign messages and help raise the visibility of proven breastfeeding support
- policymakers to support stronger regulation of infant formula marketing that reflects the full scope of the WHO Code and protects families from commercial influence.

"Families deserve feeding decisions guided by evidence, not marketing," Ms Marshall-Cerins said. "If Australia is serious about nutrition, food security, prevention and supporting families through cost-of-living pressure, then breastfeeding support and protection from commercial influence must be part of the solution."

Click here for more information about WBW 2026 and ABA's special offers during the week

World Breastfeeding Week 2026 | Australian Breastfeeding Association

About ABA

For more than 60 years, ABA has been Australia's leading authority on breastfeeding support, education and advocacy. ABA provides a range of services including a 24/7 National Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat, local groups, Breastfeeding Education Classes and evidence-based resources for parents, families and health professionals.

In the last 12 months, ABA volunteers have supported almost 60,000 Helpline calls and web-based chats through the National Breastfeeding Helpline and LiveChat services. More than 2.5 million users have accessed ABA's website for breastfeeding and parenting information. ABA's 650-plus volunteer breastfeeding counsellors and educators also run free local support groups, Breastfeeding Education Classes and provide feeding support at community events across Australia.

From pregnancy to early parenting, returning to work, or preparing for a subsequent pregnancy, ABA continues to empower women and families with education, support, community and advocacy.

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Source notes: AIHW 2010 Australian National Infant Feeding Survey; AIHW Australia's mothers and babies: Breastfeeding; Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy: 2019 and Beyond; WHO/UNICEF guidance on infant feeding and formula marketing; International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions; ABA WBW26 campaign overview and service information.