



MEDIA RELEASE

26 August 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Senate inquiry must address overdue national reforms, says ABA

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) has welcomed the Senate's establishment of the Select Committee on Women's Health. ABA urges the committee to recommend immediate action on long-overdue national reforms: a new Australian National Infant Feeding Survey and the creation of a National Breastfeeding Advisory Committee recommended in the Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy: 2019 and beyond (ANBS). ABA is also calling on the Committee to recommend stronger sustainable, equitable referral pathways to evidence-based breastfeeding support during pregnancy and throughout the postpartum period, free from commercial influence.

The Committee, chaired by Senator Marielle Smith and agreed to by the Senate on 19 August 2026, will inquire into best practice postpartum healthcare, including the cost and accessibility of infant feeding supports, and "data collection, reporting and monitoring processes and allocation of research efforts relating to postpartum healthcare." It follows renewed calls this week from the RACGP for a dedicated National Breastfeeding Advisory Council and better continuity of care in the first year after birth.

"Every day, our Helpline and LiveChat volunteers hear from mothers who want to breastfeed their babies and who still struggle to get timely, trustworthy support in those first few postpartum weeks," said Ms Victoria Marshall-Cerins, Executive Officer of the Australian Breastfeeding Association. "This inquiry is a genuine opportunity to look honestly at what is and isn't working for families in the postpartum period – and infant feeding has to be central to that conversation."

We can't fix what we no longer accurately measure

ABA is calling on the Committee to recommend that the Federal Government commission a new Australian National Infant Feeding Survey without delay. The last comprehensive national survey of its kind was conducted in 2010 – sixteen years ago, despite the ANBS recommending the survey be repeated every five years. Without current data, Australia cannot know whether breastfeeding rates are improving or declining, or whether any policy or program introduced over the past decade and a half has made any difference at all.

A new survey should provide baseline data on estimates of the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding and other feeding practices adopted by mothers/carers. Data on barriers to initiating, continuing breastfeeding, and baseline data on perinatal depression should also be captured in the survey. This would give governments a reliable baseline for targeting investment and measuring whether reforms are improving outcomes.

"The Committee's own terms of reference ask about data collection, reporting and monitoring relating to postpartum healthcare, and about the cost and accessibility of infant feeding supports," Ms Marshall-Cerins said. "You cannot properly answer either question without a national infant feeding survey. We are, in effect, being asked to fix a problem we can no longer accurately describe."

A National Breastfeeding Advisory Committee to keep policy on track

ABA supports the RACGP's call this week for a National Breastfeeding Advisory Council to help coordinate care for families in the first year after birth. When the ANBS was launched in 2019, it recommended establishing a National Breastfeeding Advisory Committee to oversee the Strategy, and ABA formally accepted an invitation to participate. Seven years later, the Committee has still not been established.

ABA recommends the Committee bring together government, people with lived experience, health professionals, researchers and community organisations to oversee implementation of the Strategy, advise on priorities, monitor progress against agreed indicators and report transparently on outcomes.

ABA is also asking the Committee to recommend a clear implementation timetable, named government responsibility and public reporting against measurable indicators, so that the inquiry's findings lead to sustained improvement.

"A National Breastfeeding Advisory Committee would give this inquiry's recommendations somewhere to land," Ms Marshall-Cerins said. "Australia has had a national breastfeeding strategy since 2019, but no dedicated body responsible for driving it, monitoring it, or holding anyone accountable for its outcomes. The RACGP's call reflects what ABA has been saying for years — and we are ready to take our seat at that table."

Postpartum support should not be a cliff edge

ABA welcomes RACGP Specific Interests Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine Chair Dr Kavita Thanakrishnan's observation that "too many women experience a cliff edge in support once they return home with a new baby." ABA's 24/7 National Breastfeeding Helpline, LiveChat and local support groups provide free, evidence-based support throughout the year, but these services rely heavily on ABA volunteers.

Timely, skilled infant-feeding support can affect women's recovery, pain, mental health and confidence. Families need equitable access to independent, evidence-based support, with seamless referral pathways between peer support, primary care and specialised clinical services. National, digital and community-based services such as ABA's should complement, not substitute for accessible, well-coordinated postpartum healthcare.

"This inquiry is an opportunity to strengthen women's and babies' healthcare by placing women's lived experiences at the centre and ensuring every woman can access timely, affordable and culturally appropriate postpartum and infant-feeding support, regardless of where they live," Ms Marshall-Cerins said.

"Mothers and babies deserve a system that measures what matters, and that backs proven support with proper governance," Ms Marshall-Cerins said. "This Committee has a real chance to make that happen for the next generation of Australian families."

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.

– ENDS –

Media Contact: ABA National Media Team

☎ 03 9686 6096

marketing@breastfeeding.asn.au