



**Australian
Breastfeeding
Association**

Media Release – embargoed to 13 February 2014

Celebrating 50 years of supporting mothers and babies

The Australian Breastfeeding Association celebrates its 50th birthday today with community birthday parties around Australia.

Formerly known as the Nursing Mothers' Association, ABA was founded in 1964 by six Melbourne mothers and has helped more than three million Australian mothers breastfeed since then.

In the 1960s the art of breastfeeding was in danger of being lost forever. Mothers who wanted to breastfeed often found it impossible to get accurate information or help with learning to breastfeed or overcoming common challenges.

'I was acutely aware of the lack of breastfeeding information in 1962 when I was unable to adequately nurse my firstborn, Brigid', Australian Breastfeeding Association founder Mary Paton said. 'I thought of the hundreds of other mothers in the same situation and of the disappointments they were experiencing.'

Mary and five other young mothers met in a lounge room in suburban Melbourne on 13 February 1964 and decided to take action. They decided to start an organisation that would provide support and evidence based information so mothers could help each other.

However even naming the Association proved problematic at the start! The word 'breastfeeding' was considered too rude by the Postmaster General (now Australia Post) to be used in the phone book and the media also refused to print it. The name the Nursing Mothers' Association was decided on and it wasn't until 2001 that the name was changed to the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Right from the start ABA worked closely with medical and scientific experts to make sure all its information was based on researched scientific evidence. Equally important, though, is sharing the experiences of thousands of breastfeeding mothers.

'It can be hard to imagine but when ABA started there wasn't even so much as a book on breastfeeding available in Australia', current ABA President Rachel Fuller said.

'Now ABA produces a huge range of information; our volunteers run more than 230 support groups around Australia, a 24-hour Breastfeeding Helpline and our breastfeeding counsellors and educators help more than 80,000 mothers each year.

'Research shows that more than 90 per cent of Australian mothers want to breastfeed so it is just as important now as in 1964 to offer mothers help and support so they can breastfeed for as long as they would like to', she said.

The Association led the way with many Australian firsts. It set up the very first support groups where mothers could come along and share knowledge and experiences; a completely unknown concept in Australia before that time.

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Breastfeeding Helpline
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Retail Subsidiary
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This was followed by the first training scheme for mother-to-mother volunteer counsellors and educators. Today ABA has more than 1100 volunteer breastfeeding counsellors and community educators who complete a Certificate IV in Breastfeeding Education qualification through the Association.

As well as providing information and mother-to-mother support ABA has advocated to the community and government to make Australia more breastfeeding friendly. This includes introducing programs like Breastfeeding Welcome Here venues, Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces and working with government to ensure breastfeeding in public is now protected by law in every state in Australia.

‘We have always and continue to believe that how a mother feeds her baby is her own personal choice’, Mrs Fuller said. ‘We strive to provide accurate, scientifically-based information so mothers can make an informed choice, but more importantly we offer the practical help and support mothers ask for to be able to breastfeed for as long as they want to.’

ENDS

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Details of all 50th birthday activities including the book of our history *Nursing Mums*, golden jubilee stamped envelope from Australia Post launching 10 February, golden jubilee rose *Little Ray of Sunshine* launching 26 March and 50th birthday national conference *Liquid Gold* 1-3 August.

About the Australian Breastfeeding Association

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) is Australia's largest breastfeeding information and support service, providing assistance to more than 80,000 mothers each year. ABA also provides up-to-date information and continuing education for thousands of health professionals working with mothers and babies. It is our vision that breastfeeding is recognised as important by all Australians and is culturally normal. As Australia's leading authority on breastfeeding, we support, educate and advocate for a breastfeeding inclusive society.