

President's Report

This year has been one of deliberate and strategic decision making for the Australian Breastfeeding Association as we continue to strive to ensure the Association is strong and sustainable in order to provide appropriate education and support to future generations.

As breastfeeding initiation rates in Australia continue to be high, calls to our National Breastfeeding Helpline increase as well as more breastfeeding friendly workplaces and public places, we know our mission is relevant, our message is being heard and our services are very much needed. With more than 320,000 babies born each year in Australia, we need to ensure ABA is responsive and accessible to the needs of these families and the services that support them.

For several years, the ABA Board has focussed on reviewing the Association's business to ensure we remain relevant and sustainable in ever-changing times. This year has seen significant changes with the appointment of a CEO, closure of our retail subsidiary, Mothers Direct, and a change to branch boundaries in ACT and NSW.

Rebecca Naylor joined the Australia Breastfeeding Association as ABA's inaugural Chief Executive Officer enabling the Board of Directors to step outside of managing operations and move closer to governing the Association. Rebecca brings to ABA a wealth of experience and knowledge in program delivery, business services and stakeholder relations. The CEO role is key as we explore opportunities to diversify income, consider the needs of families and consolidate ABA's role in ensuring breastfeeding is recognised as important, by all Australians.

The Mothers Direct shops in Melbourne and Brisbane and the online store closed on April 10, 2015. The Association moved into retail at a time when it was difficult for mothers to access products which were not readily available – initially, baby slings and lambskins, and then diversifying to include a broad range of nursing bras, breastfeeding clothing and breast pumps. Today, these products are easily found in retail stores across the country, or online retailers in Australia and overseas.

Thank you to all who have been part of Mothers Direct (and formerly Merrily Merrily Enterprises) over four decades. We are grateful to your contribution and the support given to so many mothers and their families.

ABA has a dedicated volunteer workforce, not only working on the National Breastfeeding Helpline but also providing information and support to mothers, health professionals and the general community. An ongoing challenge for the Board in achieving our mission is ensuring our volunteers are well supported. The decision to merge the ACT/ Southern NSW and NSW branches to become the ACT/New South Wales Branch will enable the workload to be spread across a greater number of volunteers.

I would like to thank the volunteers of the former ACT/SNSW branch for their ongoing participation in conversations to reach a mutually agreeable outcome and trust that the new structure will provide additional support as they continue in their volunteer roles.

Throughout the year, Rebecca and I have had meetings with a number of Federal government ministers and their teams to discuss the need for policies around parental leave and child care in order for women to reach their breastfeeding goals. We are pleased with the discussions to date and feel that there is an understanding that in order to enable women to reach national targets for breastfeeding duration, there is a need for breastfeeding friendly practices in the workplace, child care and the community.

ABA gives mother-to-mother support via the National Breastfeeding Helpline, receiving more than 85,000 calls each year. We were pleased when the Australian Government extended the funding that supports our National Breastfeeding Helpline and the training of ABA's volunteers, to June 2016.

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Pauline Pick, one of the Association's Founding Mothers. Married to Bill for 58 years, mother of three children Steven, Adrian and Jennifer and grandmother, Pauline passed away peacefully at home on 20 April 2015. Pauline was one of six remarkable women whose foresight and tenacity to offer mothers ongoing peer support for breastfeeding led to the foundation of the Nursing Mothers' Association. She continued to follow closely the news of changes and growth of the Association as shared by her daughter Jennifer who told me: 'She did something she loved and felt very strongly about. It was a joy to her to get the *Newsletter* and see the organisation growing. She would feel so proud'.

Pauline was so pleased to join the other Founding Mothers, Mary Paton, Jan Barry, Glenise Francis, Sue Woods and Pat Paterson in February 2014, at the launch of *Nursing Mums: A history of the Australian Breastfeeding Association 1964-2014* on the 50th anniversary of their first meeting in Mary's home.

Honorary Membership to the Association is a special honour, infrequently granted at the discretion of the Board. It is awarded to members who have a consistent record of excellence, who have made outstanding achievements in their field and whose long and outstanding service to ABA has contributed significant benefits to the Association. The Board was delighted to award Honorary Memberships to Debbie Court, Elizabeth Oei, Leanne Taylor, Laura Hughes, Leila Forde, Suzanne Groom and Chris Hoadley.

Sky Mykyta resigned from the ABA Board of Directors in December 2014, but continues to volunteer for the Association as a community educator, active in her local group and region. The insight and perspective Sky brought to the Board was valued, particularly on our journey of change. I would like to thank Sky for her contribution as a director of the Association and wish her well.

Robyn Hamilton and Deborah Holtham continue to be directors of the Association, each commencing 3-year terms as elected directors following the Annual General Meeting in November 2014.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of ABA throughout the year – our volunteers and staff; donors, supporters and sponsors; the Australian Government Department of Health for ongoing support of the National Breastfeeding Helpline and State governments who provide support to our branches.

Rachel Fuller
President