

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY A WELCOME MOVE

Media Release November 30th 2006

The peak body supporting Australia's breastfeeding mothers has welcomed a parliamentary inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding announced yesterday by the Federal Department of Health and Ageing.

National figures show that only 10% of Australian babies are still being breastfed exclusively at six months, falling far short of the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) recommended target of 80% and is also under the 34% world average.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) Federal President Margaret Grove said the inquiry would allow the government to collect evidence from the public, health professionals and researchers on the short and long term benefits of increasing breastfeeding rates in Australia.

"The Association has been concerned for a long time that breastfeeding has slipped down the public health agenda and we hope that this inquiry will give the government the evidence it needs to support breastfeeding", said Ms Grove.

"State and territory governments' approaches to promoting and supporting breastfeeding is varied. Some have taken steps to promote breastfeeding while others have been slow off the mark, so a national response is desperately needed".

Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Health and Ageing, Alex Somlyay, said that the Committee will examine how the Australian government can take a lead role to improve the health of the population through support for breastfeeding.

The inquiry will examine:

- the impact of marketing of breast milk substitutes on breastfeeding rates and, in particular, in disadvantaged, Indigenous and remote communities;
- the potential short and long term impact on the health of Australians of increasing the rate of breastfeeding;
- initiatives to encourage breastfeeding;
- the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding; and
- the impact of breastfeeding on the long term sustainability of Australia's health system.

The Committee invites public submissions by 28 February 2007. For a copy of the terms of reference and further information on making a submission: contact the Committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4145 or email haa.reps@aph.gov.au or visit the website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/haa

Ends.

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