World Breastfeeding Week: It’s time for Australia to commit funding to support breastfeeding

As World Breastfeeding Week 2018 begins today, the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) urges the Australian Government to commit to fully funding and implementing the Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy following its approval by Australian health ministers later this year.

Breastfeeding is critical to providing babies with optimum nutrition in early life and is closely linked to infant and maternal health. Unfortunately, rates of breastfeeding in Australia remain low.

Associate Professor Lisa Amir, general practitioner and lactation consultant representing the PHAA Women’s Health Special Interest Group confirmed, “While Australian and World Health Organization Guidelines recommend exclusive breastfeeding of infants in the first six months of life, only 15-25% of Australian mothers are currently meeting this recommendation.”

“The vast majority of Australian mothers (over 90%) initiate breastfeeding after birth, but many of them stop within the first six months. While breastfeeding is not always possible, it’s vitally important that new mothers who can breastfeed receive better support and education to do so,” Associate Professor Amir said.

The PHAA made a submission to the consultation for the Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy: 2018 and Beyond in which it expressed an overall strong support for the strategy but also concerns for the lack of funding commitments.

Association Professor Amir said, “Improving national breastfeeding rates in Australia will require substantial support from governments. We need a firm commitment to funding all of the actions in the strategy – starting with funding for an ongoing dedicated staffing in the Department of Health. The first step should be a national media campaign to normalise breastfeeding. The community needs to understand what normal infant feeding patterns are and the need for mothers to safely breastfeed in public places.”

“There also needs to be better education provided for health professionals, as many of them currently rely on their own experiences when advising new mothers. While first-hand experience is valuable, health professionals should also receive comprehensive formal training on breastfeeding,” she said.

The PHAA submission also stated concerns that the intensive marketing and promotion of infant formula products to the general public and to health professionals has a highly negative impact on national breastfeeding promotion efforts.

“Australia needs stricter regulation of infant formula advertising as the World Health Organization has reiterated that direct advertising to families is completely inappropriate. Without sufficient regulation, many mothers will continue to unnecessarily feed their infants with formula products instead of breastfeeding – which is always the safest option,” Associate Professor Amir concluded.

For further information/comment:

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