



INCREASING BREASTFEEDING AND GIVING CONSUMERS A VOICE IN MATERNITY CARE

The Australian Greens will provide public hospitals with an additional \$10 million per year of funding to:

- Understand the experiences of mothers who have recently given birth through a survey of experiences of care, including breastfeeding support;
- Expand the number of public hospitals that are accredited as Baby Friendly.

These initiatives will help breastfeeding mums get the support they need, and will also increase access to up-to-date information in the antenatal and postnatal period.

The Australian Greens recognise that maternity care is complex. Many steps are needed to improve a system that is under-funded and not sufficiently focused on new parents and babies. We will work hard to ensure that everyone is able to get best-practice pregnancy and post-birth care through a range of policy initiatives and changes to regulations. Our breastfeeding and maternity care policy will complement other Greens' initiatives to improve our healthcare system and to support women's rights and address the roots of gender inequality.

Breastfeeding isn't possible for everyone, but where it is possible, it gives babies a great start in life. Experts, including the World Health Organisation and the National Health and Medical Research Council, recommend exclusive breastfeeding¹ for around six months and then for breastfeeding to continue alongside other suitable food for up to two years and beyond.

We can do much more to support breastfeeding in Australia. While nearly all babies are breastfed initially, less than fifty per cent are exclusively breastfed at three months and less than one quarter are breastfed to five months². The reasons for this are complex, with breastfeeding mums encountering many barriers. These include not feeling supported by health professionals and in the community, starting back in paid work, and experiencing unresolved physical problems such as pain when breastfeeding.

While there is no single solution to increasing breastfeeding rates, more investment is needed in our hospitals and in other initiatives to make breastfeeding easier. Strategies recommended by experts to increase breastfeeding rates include: increasing hospital or health-system support; increasing community awareness of breastfeeding; and home and family support through counselling.

¹ Exclusive breastfeeding is when the baby is only given breast milk, including expressed breastmilk.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2010) Australian national infant feeding survey: indicator results



*Greens senator Larissa Waters puts forward a motion on black lung disease while breastfeeding her daughter in the Senate chamber in Canberra.
22 June 2017*

A critical step to understanding the experiences of breastfeeding mums is measuring and publicly reporting on experiences of care. The Greens would require hospitals to complete a survey of newborn parents so they can provide feedback on their care, including on breastfeeding support. This survey would cover prenatal and postnatal care. It would be a valuable data gathering tool for both users of our health system and health policy decision makers. We would de-identify the data and make it publicly available because we currently lack reliable information about the birth and care experiences of women in hospitals. We would allocate \$4 million per year for four years of additional funding for this important initiative.

In addition to this, we would ensure that all public hospital maternity facilities meet best practice standards for promoting and supporting breastfeeding. Right now, one of the best ways that these standards are measured is the Baby Friendly Health Initiative (the BFHI). If a hospital is BFHI accredited, women can expect it to follow 10 key steps to promote breastfeeding, including: demonstrating breastfeeding; fostering the establishment of breastfeeding support groups; and allowing new parents to remain with their babies for 24 hours a day.

In 2017, only 23 percent of maternity facilities in Australia were accredited with the BHFH, and not all of these consistently meet women's expectations. A key reason for this is that hospital budgets are under enormous pressure due to years of cuts from the major parties. The Australian Greens are committed to reversing these cuts and providing additional top-up funding. We will allocate \$6 million per year for four years of additional funding for public hospitals to attain BHFH accreditation so that they reach the standards that women expect and have a right to access. Our proposed survey initiative will also check that hospitals remain compliant with the BHFH once they have been accredited.



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