



## Making Victorian Health Facilities Baby Friendly

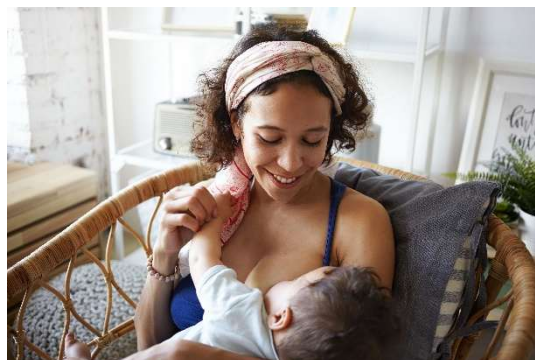
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We are all made equally in the image of God, and God desires hope-filled lives for all of us. Our faith reminds us that to love God is also to love others and ourselves. In his work *'A Public Faith. How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good'* (2011), theologian Miroslav Wolf made the case that if we believe God is love and we are created for love, we will care for our neighbours' well-being for their own sake. He stated (p.71):

*Our concern will then be not just to lead life well ourselves. Instead, we will strive for life to go well for our neighbours and for them to lead their lives well, and we will acknowledge that their flourishing is tied deeply to our flourishing.*

Thus, when possible, Christians should seek measures that promote the flourishing and well-being of all people, particularly those unable to advocate for their well-being.

Breastfeeding is the best possible start to a baby's health where it is possible. Such a decision should be made by the mother with access to the best possible health advice, free from interference by breastmilk substitute corporations.



Compared to the production of infant formula and other breastmilk substitutes, which use fossil fuels and other resources, it is safe and sustainable for the environment. Breastfeeding is readily available to people in varied economic situations (assuming the mother is adequately nourished to produce milk and can breastfeed).

The Baby Friendly Health Initiative (BFHI) is a joint World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF project that aims to create a healthcare environment where breastfeeding is the norm and practices known to promote the well-being of all mothers and infants are promoted.

In Australia, the BFHI focuses on improving healthcare for babies, their mothers, and families by ensuring all mothers, regardless of their feeding choices and circumstances, receive unbiased information, appropriate support, and factual advice during antenatal and postnatal periods.

Based on the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding compiled by WHO and UNICEF, the BFHI evidence-based accreditation programme supports maternity and community facilities to become Baby Friendly by transforming their strategies, enabling mothers to care for their babies in the best and safest way possible.

Australia has committed to achieving global and national breastfeeding targets for increasing exclusive and continued breastfeeding by 2030, and all Australian jurisdictions have endorsed the *Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2019 and Beyond* (ANBS). The ANBS is a suitable framework to improve breastfeeding. It uses a best practice and evidence-based framework to set out key areas for action at several levels and across various areas relevant to breastfeeding. In particular, the ANBS set the following actions in response to the BFHI:

- Implement the BFHI in a higher proportion of hospitals and community health services; and,
- Integrate the BFHI in national accreditation.

The *Victorian perinatal services performance indicators 2021* included indicators for breastfeeding in hospitals. The strategies for improvement listed include “consider achieving



and maintaining up-to-date, evidence-based policies and practices that align with the Baby Friendly Health Initiative.

Victoria is lagging behind other states with facilities being BFHI accredited, with only the following facilities being BFHI accredited:

- Bairnsdale Regional Health Service;
- Ballarat Health Services;
- Maryborough District Health Service;
- Royal Women's Hospital;
- Sunshine Hospital; and,
- West Gippsland Healthcare Group.

The data from Safer Care Victoria provide evidence that BFHI-accredited facilities have higher breastfeeding rates.

Compared to Victoria, Queensland has 18 facilities BFHI accredited, South Australia 12, NSW 11 and Tasmania 7, which includes all four hospitals.

The BFHI has contributed to Tasmania's lower rates of infant formula use.

### **What you can do**

Write polite and respectful letters or e-mails to:

**The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP**

Minister for Health

Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street

Melbourne, Victoria 3000

E-mail: [minister.health@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:minister.health@health.vic.gov.au)

Salutation: Dear Minister

Points to make in your letter or e-mail:

- Note that, where possible, breastfeeding provides infants the best start in life.
- Express concern that some breastmilk substitute corporations take actions that interfere with the decision of mothers on the best feeding option for the infant in the circumstances.
- Request the Victorian Government seek to have all relevant health facilities achieve accreditation under the Baby Friendly Health Initiative.