

**Submission
No 233**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Organisation: Breastfeeding Advocacy Australia

Date Received: 9 August 2023



Subject: Submission on birth trauma from Breastfeeding Advocacy Australia (BAA)

9 August 2023

Dear members of the committee,

We are writing to express our sincere concern and perspective on behalf of women who have encountered birth trauma. As an organisation that supports and advocates for women to achieve physiological breastfeeding from birth, we understand the impact that birth trauma can have on the mother-baby dyad, and we hope to shed light on how this can affect individuals and families.

Breastfeeding Advocacy Australia is a group for people who want to support, promote and protect breastfeeding in Australia. Our vision is that breastfeeding will be culturally and politically enabled, protected and promoted as the ultimate achievable norm of infant and young child feeding in Australia.

When women experience birth trauma, it is not only physically and psychologically distressing to the mother-baby dyad, it can also interrupt the dyad's physiological and hormonal postpartum processes – primarily bonding and establishing breastfeeding.

If physiological breastfeeding is unable to be established, there are short- and long-term health impacts for both the mother and the baby. For babies, these include increased risks of infections, SIDS, leukaemia, obesity, lower IQ and dental malocclusions. For mothers, these include increased risks of breast and ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

BAA would also like to acknowledge that sometimes the birth trauma women experience is related to how their caregivers treat them as they are learning to breastfeed during the immediate postpartum period. Women in this vulnerable period need and deserve to be treated with the utmost care, kindness, respect and patience. Yet some women report feeling controlled, coerced, not listened to, physically and verbally abused, and their and their baby's bodies being treated roughly as they seek support from caregivers to establish breastfeeding.

These experiences of birth trauma can be observed as being distressing and disruptive in the postpartum period and well beyond into the journey of motherhood.

We know that mothers who suffer birth trauma can experience:

- anxiety
- depression
- difficulty bonding with their baby
- difficulty establishing breastfeeding
- difficulty transitioning to motherhood
- lack of confidence in themselves as a mother
- feelings of worthlessness
- withdrawal from their communities.



We know that what affects mothers, affects their babies' growth and development.

We believe the following factors contribute to the birth trauma adversely affecting mother-baby dyads:

- hospital and government policies
- workplace cultures in maternity settings
- individual attitudes of health professionals
- lack of understanding and respect for physiological birth and breastfeeding processes.

By failing to centre the mother as the sovereign decision-maker in her pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding experiences, mothers are being put at risk for the adverse effects of birth trauma.

We would like to propose specific solutions and changes to enhance maternity care in Australia, with the aim of preventing future instances of birth trauma.

- Bundled maternity funding so that women can freely choose their antenatal care, antenatal education, place of birth, care providers, postnatal care and other supportive professionals and therapies.
- Consumer consultation for policymakers at all levels.
- Training for care providers and health professionals to understand and prioritise supporting the physiological processes of birth and breastfeeding.
- Training for care providers and health professionals to understand:
 - women's human rights in childbirth and postnatal care
 - how to offer maternity care and counsel women respectfully with all the information needed for them to make informed decisions
 - what constitutes informed consent
 - the long-lasting impacts of birth trauma on women, their babies, their families and the wider community.

Thank you for considering our submission. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute our viewpoint to the committee's ongoing inquiry. We are willing to provide additional evidence during a hearing to further support our perspective.

Sincerely,

Amy Tyson

On behalf of Breastfeeding Advocacy Australia