

The Breastfeeding Network's statement on 1st August 2017 – World Breastfeeding Week

There has been much made of the promotion of breastfeeding but there has been inadequate investment in the support required to ensure that families are given a real choice in sustaining their decision to breastfeed their babies.

Despite agreement and significant research showing that breastfeeding is a healthier option, only 34% of babies in the UK are receiving any breastmilk at six months. Compare this with Norway where more than 70% of babies are breastfed at six months.

The situation is worse for babies growing up in disadvantaged families who are even less likely to be breastfeeding at six months. On top of this the cost of formula is not cheap with ready-prepared milks from brand leaders costing a family more than £100 a week - both the health costs and burden of relying on commercial-based alternatives serves to widen health inequalities.

The 2010 Infant Feeding Survey (now cancelled) reported that most mothers who stopped breastfeeding before their baby was nine months old said they did so before they were ready. Women want to breastfeed but are let down by a lack of support.

Support available to women is at best a postcode lottery and cuts are affecting disadvantaged families the hardest as peer support projects are easy to decommission and the value of breastfeeding is hidden to the wider public. We are witnessing significant cut to all types of support across the country, but in particular peer support – which BfN provides as independent, non judgmental and evidence based, and [which has been shown](#) to play a vital role in enabling women to breastfeed for longer, and to feel confident and empowered in her choice to do so.

A healthcare professional's role is key in promoting and supporting healthy infant feeding including breastfeeding and so BfN welcome the lead that the [Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health](#) is taking on supporting breastfeeding. Healthcare professionals are well placed to support practices which enable a mother to initiate and continue breastfeeding for as long as desired by herself and her baby. There should be better training for health care professionals on managing common infant feeding difficulties and timely referral to specialist colleagues when necessary. Improved competence in prescribing for breastfeeding mothers without inappropriate recommendations to interrupt or cease breastfeeding would further work to uphold choice and build trust with mothers. Currently, [BfN's Drugs in Breastmilk service](#) handles around 45 enquiries every day from mothers and health care professionals asking about the safety of medication and treatments while breastfeeding. All information provided is independent, evidence-based and from a trained pharmacist who is sensitive to each individual's mother's breastfeeding status and wishes. This vital service is funded only by public donations.

BfN are pleased to be a signatory for [this letter](#) marking World Breastfeeding Week along with many other key organisations and individuals. We urge the Government, both local and national, to read and act on the recommendations made, and we will continue to work to make the UK a more breastfeeding friendly society.