22nd May 2017

Dear [Politician],

I am asking you to pledge your political commitment to a full enquiry into infant feeding, including the state of breastfeeding support for parents in the UK.

While the benefits of breastfeeding are both substantial and well-evidenced, the part breastfeeding could play in improving health is often overlooked, despite being a key factor in future health.

Evidence shows that breastfeeding supports loving relationships and brain development in a new baby. It protects against cancer, obesity, diabetes, infections, sudden infant death, and offers protection for maternal and infant mental health. Breastmilk offers personalised medicine for all babies, improves health and saves lives.

*“Breastfeeding is a natural ‘safety net’ against the worst effects of poverty… It is almost as if breastfeeding takes the infant out of poverty for those few vital months in order to give the child a fairer start in life and compensate for the injustices of the world into which it was born.”****James Grant, former UNICEF Executive Director (cited in Public Health Nutrition, 2004: 265)***

**As a result breastfeeding offers massive national and global economic benefit – it saves money and can help to reduce health inequalities.** On a national scale, [Unicef estimate](https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/advocacy/preventing-disease-and-saving-resources/) that even moderate increases in breastfeeding initiation and duration in the UK could save the NHS in the region of £50 million per year, and at a more local level individual families could save as much as £720 per year.

The recent World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTI) [report](https://ukbreastfeedingtrends.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/wbti-uk-report-2016-part-1-14-2-17.pdf) clearly shows that the UK is lagging behind many other countries in its approach to supporting infant feeding. In the UK we have some of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world – here only 34% of babies are receiving any breastmilk at all at six months, compared to 71% in Norway. The low rates of breastfeeding are tied up with social and cultural issues – they are rarely physical. Low rates of breastfeeding are coupled with high rates of parental dissatisfaction regarding the support they received to breastfeed.

The Breastfeeding Network is a national charity with over 20 years’ experience of supporting families to successfully breastfeed for as long as they choose. We deliver a well-evaluated peer support model which works alongside care offered by health professionals and UNICEF UK Baby-Friendly programmes. We want support for future parents to improve over the next 20 years to the point where communities become supportive places for breastfeeding and it becomes culturally normal. We are far from this reality and despite evidence for positive impact of peer support, we are seeing cuts to services disproportionately targeting peer support services across the country with little evidence of alternative support being provided.

We urge your political commitment to carry out a full public enquiry into the state of breastfeeding and recommend that the following should be prioritised:

* Re-establishing robust data collection on a par with the cancelled Infant Feeding Survey – The [RCPCH](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/) have also stressed the importance of this as part of their [‘Child Health Matters Vision for 2017’](https://spark.adobe.com/page/gPU294tHZYveq/).
* Exploring the challenges around bottle feeding, including independent, evidence-based information for those bottle feeding and for introducing solid foods.
* Examination into why the UK has the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world.
* Explore the support currently available for new parents to see what is and isn’t working, drawing on available experience and good practice.
* Appoint a national committee to make recommendations to policy makers and Government that cover national policies and governmental responsibility and leadership.

We would be grateful if you could summarise your party’s main policies to show how your proposed government will support measures around infant feeding and inequalities, so that we can share this information with our members, volunteers and supporters, and they can keep this in mind when they vote at the upcoming elections.

If you would like to know more about our work, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



**Shereen Fisher**

CEO, Breastfeeding Network