

Media Release

14 April 2010

Celebrating the health and economic benefits of breastfeeding

The importance of breastfeeding to the development of children, as well as its \$2.2 billion annual contribution to the national economy, will be the topic of a statewide forum to be conducted this week.

Breastfeeding – Every Drop Counts is a free event for the entire community, including breastfeeding mothers (past and present), their partners, support people, as well as their babies and children.

Breastfeeding – Every Drop Counts is being presented as a simultaneous video-linked event in the north and south of the State on Friday 16 April. It is being supported by a grant from the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation (TEYF).

TEYF Chair Dr Sue Jenkins said the economic benefits of breastfeeding had long been overlooked.

Dr Jenkins said everybody understood that breast milk was important for the health of babies and mothers, but its value to family budgets and the overall economy was often overlooked.

She said it was estimated that breastfeeding contributed around \$2.2 billion annually to the Australian economy.

“This contribution is largely ignored. For example, some \$30 million to \$50 million is spent each year on marketing infant formula, yet only \$2 million is allocated to the National Breastfeeding Strategy.

“As well as its health benefits, it’s time to also recognise breastfeeding’s importance in the family budget and the nation’s economy.

“Mother’s milk not only has enormous health advantages for the baby but has a significant, and largely invisible value in dollar terms for family living costs and the national economy,” Dr Jenkins said.

“We are pleased that Dr Julie Smith, a senior economist with the Australian National University will join us to discuss the economic importance of breastfeeding, while mothers and friends enjoy a healthy morning tea.

“Along with our guest speakers there will be fun activities and prizes to be won. It will be a great morning for mothers old and new.

“We will also be monitoring a ‘dollar meter’ to show the economic value of breastfeeding throughout the celebration.”

Dr Jenkins said a main aim of the event was to raise the profile of the importance of breastfeeding and increase awareness of its economic benefits in the community and particularly among key decision-makers in state and local government and the business and economic sectors. This was in line with TEYF’s report on childhood issues that recommended increased promotion and awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding.

“While 80 percent of Tasmanian mothers leave hospital breastfeeding or intending to breastfeed, this falls short of the national target of 90 percent. Similarly, it’s estimated that only 50 percent of Tasmanian babies are still breastfed at six months on age, significantly below the national target of 80 percent.

“We need to devise and support strategies to enable us to meet the national targets,” Dr Jenkins said.

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Media note: Breastfeeding – Every Drop Counts will take place on Friday 16 April, simultaneously at the Launceston Tram Shed, Inveresk Rail Yards, Invermay Road, and at the Glenorchy Civic Centre, Cooper Street from 10am to 12pm. Dr Smith and Dr Jenkins will be available for media interviews between 11.45 am and 12.30 pm at the Glenorchy Civic Centre.

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Media comment contact:

Dr Sue Jenkins, Chair The Tasmanian Early Years Foundation, telephone 0438 345 991

Dr Julie Smith, via Julie Williams, Dept Health and Human Services, telephone 0409 419 661