

## Position statement: Breastfeeding and relations with the formula milk industry

17/01/2025

The South African Paediatric Association (SAPA) is committed to promoting, supporting and protecting breastfeeding. While artificial feeding may occasionally be necessary, it is essential that commercial influences and the inappropriate marketing of Commercial Milk Formula (CMF)<sup>1</sup> do not undermine breastfeeding.<sup>1</sup>

### Evidence

- The 2024 *South African Child Gauge* describes how rising poverty (71%), stunting (29%) and overnutrition (23%) are threatening young children's health, survival and development.<sup>2</sup>
- Increasing breastfeeding rates is a powerful investment in preterm, neonatal and child health. It protects children against the key drivers of under-five mortality (malnutrition, diarrhea and lower respiratory tract infections), improves IQ, and reduces obesity and non-communicable diseases later in life.<sup>3,4</sup>
- The Tshwane Declaration signals government's commitment to promote, support and protect breastfeeding<sup>5</sup> – including the 10 steps to support successful breastfeeding, breastfeeding in the workplace, and regulations to restrict the marketing of commercial milk formula (CMF).
- Yet, the most recent 2023 Lancet Series on Breastfeeding describes how aggressive and misleading marketing by manufacturers and distributors of CMF exploits parents fears and concerns and adversely affects infant and young child feeding practices.<sup>4</sup>
- The CMF industry also aims to influence health professionals (HPs) through the sponsorship of sub-specialist and CPD training, conferences and academic research. Almost half of HPs interviewed in South Africa indicate that they had been approached by an industry representative, and more than a quarter attended conferences or events sponsored by CMF companies.<sup>6</sup>
- Industry sponsorship is of concern as it establishes a visible, reciprocal relationship between CMF companies and HPs, where incentives and conflicting loyalties may compromise HP's primary duty to patient care,<sup>7</sup> and encourage them to prescribe specialised CMF in situations where they may not be required.<sup>8</sup>
- For this reason, WHO and the National Department of Health (NDoH) have put in place measures to protect breastfeeding and remove commercial pressures from the infant feeding arena. This includes South Africa's *Regulation R991 on Foodstuffs for Infants and Young Children* (2012),<sup>9</sup> and the World Health Assembly *Resolution 69.9 on Ending Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children* (2016)<sup>10</sup> calling on Member States and HP Association's to ensure that such companies do not sponsor scientific meetings and meetings of health professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> Commercial milk formula include a range of milks specifically marketed for feeding infants and young children from 0 – 36 months, including infant formula, follow-up formula, growing up milks and specialised formula for infants with medical conditions.

### **Commitment to promote, support and protect breastfeeding**

1. SAPA supports WHO, UNICEF and NDoH recommendations for optimal infant and young child feeding: including early initiation of breastfeeding; exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life; followed by the introduction of safe, nutritionally adequate complementary foods and continued breastfeeding up to 2 years of age or beyond.
2. SAPA supports WHO and UNICEF's '*10 Steps to successful breastfeeding*' and *Mother and Baby-Friendly Initiative* and commits to educating our members about how to promote, protect and support breastfeeding.
3. SAPA supports the call for breastfeeding friendly workplaces and public spaces.
4. SAPA will not accept CMF sponsorship in line with WHO and UNICEF guidelines,<sup>11</sup> including:
  - Provision of gifts and in-kind support for specific activities of conferences and other events, e.g. catering and refreshments, fees and/or reimbursements for speakers
  - Advertisements of any company, brand, or product, e.g. adverts and promotional materials in programme booklets, bags or journal supplements
  - Sponsorship of sessions or side sessions at conferences or other events
  - Provision of financial support or aid for scholarships, awards or grants including but not limited to registration, travel or accommodation at conferences or other events
  - Sale and sharing of members' and delegates' contact details
  - Sale or hire of exhibition space and other marketing opportunities at conferences or other events
  - Sponsorship or funding of publications including websites, clinical guidelines and medical journals, or the inclusion of industry funded advertisements or advertorials in such publications.

### **Guidance on engagement with the CMF industry**

A small proportion of infants may require CMF or therapeutic dietetic products. The following guidelines aim to ensure that paediatricians can access scientific and technical information about CMF products in a way that does not create perverse incentives or conflicts of interest:

- Information about CMF products should ideally be sourced from independent peer-reviewed research, rather than from industry-funded studies, company websites, or sales representatives.
- Regular, direct and unsolicited contact by industry representatives is discouraged.
- While Regulation R991 allows the CMF industry to provide HPs with scientific and technical information on how to use their products, it stipulates that this may not contain any promotional material, nor any health, medicinal or nutrition claims.
- Do not accept any gifts, samples, donations, special offers, meals or refreshments from CMF companies, or offers to sponsor attendance at conferences, educational or scientific meetings.
- Do not display CMF products, brand names, logos, or educational material on infant and young child feeding in your facility/practice.

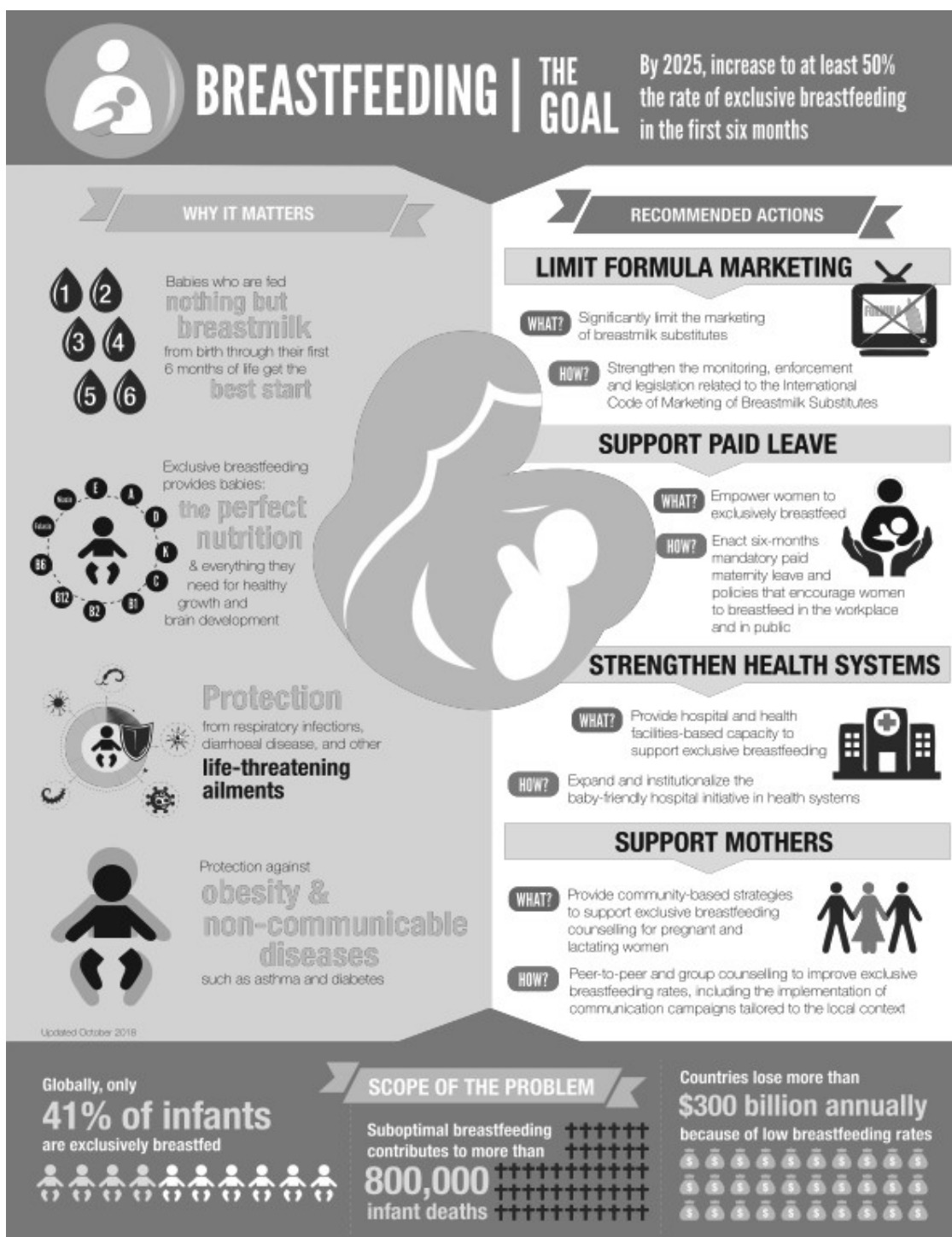
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Treasurer: Andrew Redfern

Ex-officio: Ziyaad Dangor

Exec Members: Martie Wege, Shaegan Iruken, Samina Yakoob, Zinhle Vilakazi, Mark Atkins, Mignon McCulloch  
SA Paediatric Association (RF) NPC is a registered non-profit company (Registration number 2023 / 194746 / 08)



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