

# Speech-language pathology and breastfeeding: contributions to sustainable support systems

Fonoaudiologia e amamentação: contribuições para sistemas de apoio sustentáveis

Fonoaudiología y lactancia materna: contribuciones a sistemas de apoyo sostenibles

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This communication highlights the importance of Speech-Language Pathology in strengthening breastfeeding and building sustainable support systems, in alignment with the 2025 World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) campaign. The campaign is coordinated globally by the *World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)* and, in Brazil, by the Ministry of Health, *International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)*, and scientific and professional entities. The 2025 WBW theme is: “Breastfeeding: Promote, Protect, Support – Building sustainable support systems.” **Purpose.** This text aims to emphasize the strategic role of speech-language pathologists in promoting breastfeeding and to propose actions aligned with the WBW objectives: promote, inform, galvanize, and engage. **Description.** Strategic actions for speech-language pathology are presented in alignment with the campaign’s goals, including the development of educational materials, professional training, advocacy, and work in vulnerable settings and emergency situations. **Final considerations.** The transformative potential of Speech-Language Pathology is reinforced in the promotion of breastfeeding through sustainable, integrated, and socially committed practices across different contexts, highlighting human milk as a citizen-driven and environmentally responsible choice.

**Keywords:** Breast Feeding; Speech-Language Pathology; Health Promotion; Health Education; Milk, Human; Health Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice.

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## Authors’ contributions:

LF: study conception; methodology; data collection; drafting of the manuscript.

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## Resumo

**Introdução.** Esta comunicação destaca a importância da Fonoaudiologia no fortalecimento da amamentação e na construção de sistemas de apoio sustentáveis, em alinhamento com a campanha da Semana Mundial da Amamentação (SMAM) de 2025. Essa campanha é coordenada globalmente pela *World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)* e, no Brasil, pelo Ministério da Saúde, a *International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)* e entidades científicas e profissionais. A SMAM de 2025 tem como tema: “*Priorizar a amamentação: construir sistemas de apoio sustentáveis*”. **Objetivo.** Ressaltar o papel estratégico do fonoaudiólogo na promoção do aleitamento humano, e propor ações alinhadas aos objetivos da SMAM: promover, informar, consolidar e envolver-se. **Descrição.** São apresentadas ações estratégicas para atuação fonoaudiológica alinhadas aos objetivos da campanha, como a produção de materiais educativos, capacitação profissional, *advocacy*, atuação em contextos de vulnerabilidade e em situações de emergência. **Considerações finais.** Reforça-se o potencial transformador da Fonoaudiologia na promoção do aleitamento humano por meio de práticas sustentáveis, integradas e socialmente comprometidas em diferentes contextos de atuação, destacando o leite humano como uma escolha cidadã e ambientalmente responsável.

**Palavras-chave:** Aleitamento Materno; Fonoaudiologia; Promoção da Saúde; Educação em Saúde; Leite Humano; Conhecimentos, Atitudes e Prática em Saúde.

## Resumen

**Introducción.** Esta comunicación resalta la importancia de la Fonoaudiología en el fortalecimiento de la lactancia humana y en la construcción de sistemas de apoyo sostenibles, en consonancia con la campaña de la Semana Mundial de la Lactancia Materna (SMLM) 2025. Esa campaña es coordinada a nivel global por la *World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)* y, en Brasil, por el Ministerio de Salud, la *International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)* y entidades científicas y profesionales. La SMLM 2025 tiene como tema: “*Priorizar la lactancia: construir sistemas de apoyo sostenibles*”. **Objetivo.** Destacar el papel estratégico del fonoaudiólogo en la promoción de la lactancia humana y proponer acciones alineadas con los objetivos de la SMLM: promover, informar, consolidar e involucrarse. **Descripción.** Se presentan acciones estratégicas para la actuación fonoaudiológica en consonancia con los objetivos de la campaña, tales como la elaboración de materiales educativos, capacitación profesional, *advocacy*, intervención en contextos de vulnerabilidad y en situaciones de emergencia. **Consideraciones finales.** Se refuerza el potencial transformador de la Fonoaudiología en la promoción de la lactancia humana mediante prácticas sostenibles, integradas y socialmente comprometidas en diferentes contextos de actuación, destacando la leche humana como una elección ciudadana y ambientalmente responsable.

**Palabras clave:** Lactancia Materna; Fonoaudiología; Promoción de la Salud; Educación en Salud; Leche Humana; Conocimientos, Actitudes y Práctica en Salud.





## Introduction

Human breastfeeding is a cornerstone of global health, with a significant impact on reducing infant mortality and preventing maternal diseases. It is estimated that breastfeeding could prevent up to 13% of all deaths among children under two years of age, representing more than 800,000 lives saved annually worldwide. In addition, breastfeeding is associated with the prevention of over 20,000 maternal deaths from breast cancer each year<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the widely recognized benefits, breastfeeding indicators still vary considerably among countries. Over the past decade, global rates of exclusive breastfeeding have increased by 10 percentage points, reaching 48%, according to the *Global Breastfeeding Scorecard* developed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>2</sup>. However, this result remains below the 2025 target of 50% and far from the projected 2030 goal of 70%, which many consider difficult to achieve, particularly because further progress tends to be more challenging as overall coverage expands<sup>3</sup>.

In Brazil, although the situation shows advances, important challenges remain. Data from the *National Survey on Child Nutrition and Feeding (ENANI-2019)* indicate that 96.2% of children under two years of age were breastfed at some point, and 62.4% received human milk during the first hour of life. The prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding up to six months reached 45.8% in 2019, still below the WHO target for 2025<sup>4</sup>. This scenario underscores the persistence of multiple barriers, including cultural aspects, misinformation, weak family support systems, and aggressive marketing of infant formula<sup>5-7</sup>, even on social media<sup>8</sup>, which directly interferes with the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding.

In response to these challenges, various international strategies have been implemented to promote and protect breastfeeding. Among these efforts, the establishment of the *World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)* in 1991 stands out. WABA is an international network composed of individuals and organizations committed to the protection, promotion, and support of breastfeeding<sup>9</sup>. Its actions are guided by the *Innocenti Declaration*<sup>10</sup>, the *Ten Links for Nurturing the Future*, and the *WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding*. WABA coordinates with

diverse institutions, thereby expanding the impact of its actions across multiple contexts.

One of WABA's main initiatives is the *World Breastfeeding Week (WBW)*, celebrated annually since 1992 from August 1st to 7th. The event was created to continue the commitments of the 1990 *Innocenti Declaration*<sup>11</sup>. This global movement seeks to raise awareness among society and governments about the importance of breastfeeding and to stimulate public policies that protect breastfeeding practices. Since 2016, WABA has aligned WBW with the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, adopting the designation *World Breastfeeding Week – Sustainable Development Goals (WBW-SDG) 2030*. In Brazil, WBW is organized by the *International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)* and the Ministry of Health, with the support of scientific and professional institutions. Since 2017, Federal Law No. 13.435 has established August as “Breastfeeding Month,” also known as “Golden August,” expanding awareness activities and reinforcing the importance of intersectoral support systems<sup>12</sup>. Professionals from different fields, such as Speech-Language Pathology, play a fundamental role in these support systems, strengthening human breastfeeding.

The role of speech-language pathologists in breastfeeding is regulated by Resolution No. 661/2022 of the *Federal Council of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology*, which defines their participation across all levels of healthcare and in multidisciplinary teams such as human milk banks and women's support centers. The regulation establishes key competencies such as the assessment, diagnosis, intervention, and follow-up of the breastfeeding dyad, with an emphasis on promoting breastfeeding. Core professional attributions include evaluating the functioning of neonates and infants, understanding the physiology of lactation, promoting the well-being of the dyad and family, providing consultancy, and participating in continuing education programs, among others<sup>13</sup>. In this way, Speech-Language Pathology contributes strategically to overcoming clinical barriers, strengthening support systems, and ensuring breastfeeding success.

Considering the relevance of international mobilizations in favor of breastfeeding, this communication aims to propose strategic actions aligned with the 2025 WBW objectives, strengthen the role of Speech-Language Pathology, and encourage

reflections on intersectoral initiatives focused on building sustainable breastfeeding support systems.

## Description

This section presents a set of action proposals developed by the authors, aligned with the four objectives of the 2025 World Breastfeeding Week (WBW), along with reflections on this year's campaign. The 2025 WBW theme is *"Prioritizing Breastfeeding: Building Sustainable*

*Support Systems"* (see Figure 1). The campaign establishes four main objectives: (1) **To inform** people about their role in creating sustainable and supportive environments for breastfeeding; (2) **To consolidate** continuous breastfeeding support as a vital component of sustainable environments; (3) **To engage** individuals and organizations in improving collaboration and support for breastfeeding; and (4) **To promote** actions that create breastfeeding support systems contributing to sustainable environments<sup>14</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Logo of the 2025 World Breastfeeding Week. Source: WABA 2025© All rights reserved.<sup>14</sup>

By expanding the focus beyond the breastfeeding dyad, the campaign reinforces the importance of coordinated support systems among different sectors and social actors, recognizing breastfeeding as a civic and socially responsible practice, particularly in a global scenario marked by inequalities, climate emergencies, and humanitarian crises.

Within this framework, Speech-Language Pathology plays a key role in strengthening and implementing sustainable breastfeeding support systems. Through strategic and integrated

interventions, it is possible to expand the reach of breastfeeding promotion initiatives and foster positive impacts on the health of the mother–infant dyad, while consolidating professional practices committed to equity and sustainability. Chart 1 presents strategic action proposals developed by the authors, designed for speech-language pathologists, other healthcare professionals, and policymakers, intending to advance and strengthen sustainable breastfeeding support systems.

<insert chart 1>

**Chart 1.** Strategic Actions for Sustainable Breastfeeding Support..

2025 WBW Objective	Actions
1. Inform people about their role in creating sustainable and supportive environments for breastfeeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop educational materials (leaflets, videos, podcasts, and other resources) on the importance of breastfeeding.</li> <li>• Conduct continuing education activities for healthcare professionals, educators, and community leaders.</li> <li>• Organize support groups for experience-sharing and breastfeeding guidance.</li> <li>• Deliver lectures and workshops in community settings to share information on breastfeeding and its social and environmental impacts.</li> <li>• Collaborate with local and regional media to increase public awareness of breastfeeding.</li> <li>• Design interactive digital campaigns on social media aimed at adolescents, parents, and caregivers, emphasizing the importance of breastfeeding support.</li> <li>• Promote community campaigns that engage local stakeholders in valuing breastfeeding as a collective good.</li> <li>• Raise awareness among health professionals about the importance of avoiding relationships with companies that produce or promote breast milk substitutes, ensuring ethical and conflict-free practice</li> </ul>
2. Consolidate continuous breastfeeding support as a vital component for creating a sustainable environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide continuous support during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period, ensuring individualized guidance that encourages breastfeeding as a sustainable practice.</li> <li>• Work collaboratively with healthcare professionals such as pediatricians, nurses, and lactation consultants to promote multidisciplinary care pathways.</li> <li>• Contribute to the development of care protocols that facilitate the maintenance of lactation across different contexts.</li> <li>• Offer technical consultancy and support to health centers, hospitals/maternity units, and primary healthcare facilities.</li> <li>• Promote the use of care-oriented technologies (telehealth, mobile apps, or text messaging) to ensure remote and ongoing guidance in hard-to-reach areas.</li> <li>• Participate in the implementation of continuous breastfeeding support services, such as lactation rooms, post-discharge follow-up groups, and home visits in public and private institutions.</li> </ul>
3. Engage with individuals and organizations to improve collaboration and breastfeeding support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in advocacy actions to raise awareness among governments, companies, and organizations.</li> <li>• Strengthen breastfeeding support networks through collaboration with NGOs and other entities.</li> <li>• Train community leaders as multipliers of breastfeeding information.</li> <li>• Establish partnerships with schools and universities to engage young people in breastfeeding promotion.</li> <li>• Participate in hospital committees focused on humanized care and best perinatal practices, contributing to the strengthening of breastfeeding.</li> <li>• Mobilize local and international organizations to support public policies favorable to breastfeeding, including workplace initiatives.</li> <li>• Promote and support the Working Breastfeeding Woman strategy in companies and organizations.</li> <li>• Raise awareness among daycare managers and staff about the importance of breastfeeding.</li> <li>• Build partnerships with labor unions, professional councils, and associations to strengthen institutional support and formalize breastfeeding promotion.</li> <li>• Support the inclusion of breastfeeding-related topics in municipal and state health plans.</li> </ul>
4. Promote actions that build breastfeeding support systems, contributing to a sustainable environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the development of public policies that include breastfeeding as an essential component of maternal–infant healthcare.</li> <li>• Join emergency networks focused on protecting breastfeeding in contexts of social vulnerability, forced displacement, or extreme events.</li> <li>• In crises such as natural disasters, public emergencies, or humanitarian crises, coordinate efforts to ensure breastfeeding continuity.</li> <li>• Implement and support monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of breastfeeding support systems.</li> <li>• Support breastfeeding and infant feeding in shelters and care units for vulnerable populations.</li> <li>• Identify and record risk factors for early weaning, articulating preventive and integrated care strategies for the mother–infant dyad.</li> <li>• Promote respect and inclusion of lactation among diverse populations, including Black women, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQIAPN+ individuals, ensuring that all breastfeeding persons have access to appropriate support within healthcare systems.</li> <li>• Mobilize healthcare professionals and managers for the integrated use of digital tools (such as apps, electronic health records, and telehealth platforms) to enable coordinated breastfeeding follow-up across care networks.</li> <li>• Collaborate with referral and counter-referral systems to integrate breastfeeding as a key component of comprehensive maternal–infant care.</li> <li>• Facilitate intersectoral communication among maternity hospitals, primary healthcare units, and specialized services to ensure continuity of breastfeeding care.</li> </ul>

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.





Beyond its clinical scope, the speech-language pathologist plays a significant role through educational, community-based, interdisciplinary, and policy-oriented approaches, which should align with the 2025 WBW pillars and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>15</sup>. This role is supported by Resolution No. 661/2022 of the Federal Council of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology<sup>13</sup>, which defines professional responsibilities such as promoting the well-being, interaction, and self-regulation of neonates and infants, as well as supporting the family and healthcare team during breastfeeding. It also includes participation in continuing education programs for multidisciplinary teams, caregivers, and families<sup>5</sup>.

Furthermore, the 2025 WBW, with its focus on the environment and climate change, emphasizes the need for support systems that prioritize breastfeeding as a sustainable, safe, and ecologically responsible practice. Human milk is a natural, renewable food source produced without significant environmental impact, unlike formula-based feeding systems, which are estimated to require more than 4,000 liters of water to produce just 1 kg of powdered formula<sup>16</sup>. In this context, speech-language pathologists can contribute through research, impact assessments, and educational strategies that raise awareness about the environmental benefits of breastfeeding and its importance for the health of the mother–infant dyad.

Aligned with this perspective, WABA launched the *Warm Chain of Support for Breastfeeding* initiative, which places the breastfeeding dyad at the center of care and connects actors across the health, community, and workplace sectors to ensure a continuum of care during the first 1,000 days of life<sup>17</sup>. This initiative is directly linked to WBW<sup>10,14</sup> and to the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*<sup>18</sup>, as all share the commitment to protecting and promoting breastfeeding.

In light of these challenges, especially in emergencies such as natural disasters, humanitarian crises, and forced displacement, speech-language pathologists specialized in lactation must be prepared to adopt strategies that ensure the protection of breastfeeding for infants and young children<sup>19,20</sup>. It is essential to maintain breastfeeding continuity by creating safe environments with proper signage, providing essential resources, and sustaining effective management practices. Moreover, the safe handling and use of expressed human milk is

critical<sup>19,21</sup>. With experience in neonatal care and lactation programs, these professionals can produce materials and offer support to sustain breastfeeding in adverse conditions.

In this context of vulnerability, in 2024, Brazil's Ministry of Health (MoH) issued *Technical Note No. 56*<sup>20</sup>, titled “*Guidelines for the Promotion, Protection, and Support of Breastfeeding and Healthy Complementary Feeding in States of Emergency, Public Calamity, and Natural Disasters*.” This publication was prompted by extreme weather events that caused severe flooding in the state of Rio Grande do Sul that same year and aimed to guide health professionals and public managers on breastfeeding practices during emergencies. In addition to this document, other publications<sup>19,21</sup> have also been developed to support health teams, governments, and families facing food insecurity caused by extreme climatic events.

Moreover, Speech-Language Pathology must contribute to the design and implementation of public policies and intersectoral programs that support breastfeeding, through team training, participation in committees, councils, and child protection networks, thus strengthening its presence in political decision-making spaces. Within healthcare teams, speech-language pathologists can engage across different levels of care, fostering networks sensitive to social, cultural, and territorial specificities. Their professional competencies include conducting population-based assessments using epidemiological studies, coordinating interdisciplinary health programs, and evaluating the impact of actions related to breastfeeding promotion and protection<sup>13,22</sup>. They can also help develop community leadership, promote peer support, and value local knowledge, thereby reinforcing the agency and empowerment of breastfeeding individuals.

By recognizing itself as a key profession in breastfeeding support, protection, and promotion, Speech-Language Pathology strengthens its professional identity and reaffirms its ethical commitment to health equity. Given current global challenges, it is essential to expand and consolidate the presence of speech-language pathologists in building resilient, well-connected breastfeeding support networks that are sensitive to family, territorial, and social diversity. In this regard, several initiatives are already being carried out by speech-language pathologists within universities through extension projects, conflict-free scientific congresses, and ac-





tions by the *Brazilian Society of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology*, which recognizes and awards the best *Golden August* breastfeeding awareness campaigns.

The proposed strategic actions outlined by the authors can be adapted to different professional and healthcare realities and are not intended to be rigid in implementation. It is recommended that speech-language pathologists, together with their teams and services, develop collective strategies aimed at reaching families and society at large, promoting effective, continuous, and comprehensive breastfeeding support. This approach can help strengthen sustainable care networks that respect local specificities and contribute to improving public health.

## Final Considerations

This paper aims to broaden and strengthen the discussion on the role of Speech-Language Pathology within global strategies that support breastfeeding, emphasizing sustainable, integrated, and socially committed practices across different contexts of professional practice. In this sense, all speech-language pathologists are invited to continuously promote, not only during World Breastfeeding Week, the importance of breastfeeding for the health of the mother–infant dyad and for the advancement of professional practices committed to public health and social justice.

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