

Breastmilk Substitutes (BMS) Call to Action – 25 September 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Call To Action regarding the marketing communications of Infant Nutrition Products within the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (the Code). We are very supportive of the efforts to improve transparency and unite stakeholders on this important topic and share in your focus for optimal nutrition for infants and children.

H&H Group (the Group) is guided by our mission to make people healthier and happier. We aim to do what we can to ensure children have the best possible nutritional start in life. The Group is very proud to provide high quality, safe and age-appropriate nutrition for infants and is committed to working in collaboration with governments, regulatory authorities, health care professionals and public health advocates to optimize the health and wellbeing of infants.

H&H is a supporter and advocate for breast-feeding, recognizing that it provides the best exclusive nutrition for babies in the first six months of life. We also promote the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation to introduce adequate nutritious complementary foods from six months, along with sustained breastfeeding up to two years of age and beyond. This is reiterated through our commitments to: having progressively dedicated breast-feeding spaces in all offices with over 30 team members; and, supporting breastmilk banks in our different markets.

Over recent years, H&H Group has taken much effort to develop our global BMS Policy, aligning with the Code, and have engaged our key stakeholders in the drafting process. Strengthening our marketing practices for all foods and nutrition products, including breastmilk substitutes and complementary foods, is a continued focus for us. We are currently working with all relevant internal teams to detail our training, actions and forward milestones to achieve more consistent delivery of marketing breastmilk substitutes in line with the WHO Code globally.

Globally, regulators have interpreted the Code to varying levels, and our Global BMS Policy is in alignment with many of the most stringent interpretations, particularly regarding advertising of infant formula. As set out in our Global Policy, H&H Group adopts and implements local market regulations as a minimum standard and is supportive of legislation that creates a level playing field for all companies.

Breast-feeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthiest growth and development of infants. We support and promote the practice of breast-feeding, and of reviving the practice where it is in decline to improve the health and nutrition of infants and young children. We actively support and encourage regulatory bodies in which we operate to adopt this mindset.

Where mothers are unable or choose not to breastfeed, we believe substitutes that are developed with high quality formulations, prepared properly and used correctly, are critical. Breastmilk composition is the gold standard and we constantly invest in research to understand the functions of this amazingly complex nutriment. This is inspiring for our product development and with this in mind, we support research and development and the use of premium ingredients to develop high-quality products that aim to help give parents or carers the best nutritional support for their children should they need it.

We believe in supporting parents with the opportunity for flexibility. For example, we strongly believe in taking action to achieve gender equality, and breastmilk substitutes and formulated supplementary foods for young children (FSFYC) provide the ability for mum to return to work should she choose and fathers and partners to fulfill responsibilities as we provide opportunity for more equal parenthood. We are supporting this belief with the commitment to develop a global Parental Leave Policy that will support our team members as they come to grips with being new parents.

Our wellness philosophy at the Group hinges on three pillars of wellness – nutrition, movement and mind. Mental health is of equal importance to physical health and we understand that new mothers are under intense pressure throughout the early stages post-birth, and whilst breastfeeding is absolutely best, a negative experience arising from challenges a mother may have with breastfeeding may have an impact on postpartum depression, and this too relates to keeping both mother and baby healthy.

Given the widely varying application of laws (country by country) regarding these products, the proposed “global restrictions” are not in alignment with some local formal laws, and public health directives. Can you please outline how you see this being implemented? We would be keen to understand the engagement you have undertaken with the various governments and their feedback and progress, particularly those with regulations that vary to the existing WHO Code.

The H&H Group has a strong policy position supporting relevant frameworks that restrict irresponsible behaviours that have been shown to negatively impact the uptake of breastfeeding and a standards-based quality and safety regime.

We would be very pleased to continue discussion on investigating and assessing best evidence in this area to inform further policy developments and look forward to working with you and our industry counterparts in shaping the future of this important topic.