



30th March 2017

Chairman
Panel on Health Services
c/o Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Dear Chairman and Honorable Members,

**In Support of Hong Kong Code of Marketing of Formula Milk and Related Products, and
Food Products for Infants & Young Children (HK Code)**

Our School of Public Health write to indicate our full support for the Government's promulgation of the HK Code to take action against aggressive marketing of or misleading promotional messages about breastmilk substitutes so as to protect infants and young children.

Marketing of follow-up formula is directly and strongly correlated with the perception and subsequent use of breastmilk substitutes as noted by the World Health Organization (WHO) statement in 2013.¹ In Hong Kong, half of parents believe follow-up formula has added nutrients that promote the child's brain development which cannot be found in other foods.² Current marketing of follow-up formula is also de facto promoting infant formula through similar packaging and branding that has confused mothers.³

Formula milk advertising has focused on numerous infant health outcomes, particularly gastrointestinal health and brain development. However, it is well-established that breastfeeding confers better protection against gastrointestinal and other infections during infancy than formula feeding, in both developing and developed settings,⁴ including in Hong Kong.⁵ Furthermore, the trial of breastfeeding promotion (PROBIT) in Belarus showed that sustained breastfeeding may improve certain aspects of cognition in young children.⁶ Although ω -3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (e.g. DHA or EPA) may improve cognitive development during infancy, this is regardless of the form, i.e., as a supplement or in formula,⁷ which means all possible benefits can be achieved without the use of formula milk. In fact, a small trial found formula-fed or DHA-supplemented infants had poorer verbal IQ at preschool age than breastfed infants.⁸

The HK Code will provide timely promotion of evidence-based practices to build up community standards and help the trade formulate their marketing strategy for breastmilk substitutes without conveying biased information or discouraging breastfeeding.

To safeguard our future generation, we strongly support the full implementation of the HK Code, aligning Hong Kong with advice from the World Health Assembly resolution in 2016 for curbing inappropriate marketing of any breastmilk substitute up to the age of 36 months.⁹

Yours sincerely,

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