

MEDELA'S LATEST "MARKETING GUIDELINES" STILL FALL SHORT OF THEIR OBLIGATIONS

Key takeaways

- Medela commits to meaningful changes in their practices that have the potential to reduce misinformation about the Calma teat
- Healthcare workers' and organizations' relationships with Medela as regards funding, partnerships and other affiliation is unchanged
- The current commitments outlined do not meet Medela's obligations as a manufacturer/distributor of products covered by the Code, including donations of inappropriate products in emergencies
- Medela's conflicts of interest extend beyond the Code including breastpump company funding for non-profit milk banks and exploitative marketing including sponsorship and donations of breastpumps during emergencies

On August 11 2023, Medela AG updated a [notice to its customers](#) regarding its compliance with the company's obligations under the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (the Code), stating that the company was committing to a series of changes to its marketing practices. The statement, updated from similar commitments [made in June 2021](#), [March 2020](#), and [May 2018](#), uses clear language about meeting its obligations under the Code, and commits to only factual information about bottles and teats on its websites. Medela says it will no longer show images of bottle feeding or bottles with teats and will continue its 2021 commitment to not providing teat samples to the general public and health care workers and greater transparency of funding to health care workers and health care systems.

These are positive changes that we welcome, and they fall far short of Medela's obligations as a manufacturer of products covered by the Code and the global Operational Guidance for Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies v3.0 (OG-IFE.) Preventing the exploitation of vulnerable families, infants, young children, especially in emergencies, disasters and conflicts, is of utmost importance. Both the Code and the OG-IFE exist to protect children and ensure the highest attainable standard of health and nutrition for infants and young children. Failing to meet obligations under the Code and to abide by universally accepted guidance in emergencies means failing to respect the human rights of infants and their families, with significant consequences.

SafelyFed Canada urges organizations and individuals to consider the history of manufacturers and distributors of Code-covered products claiming 'commitment' to the Code and Medela's own lengthy participation in that history. Prior to 2008, Medela did not make any stand-alone products covered by the Code. Close relationships existed between lactation experts, health care workers and Medela as a result of their dominance of the breast pump market and many breastfeeding organizations relied upon funding from Medela.

With the launch of the Calma teat, Medela undertook a major shift in its business approach to sell "infant feeding systems" rather than pumps. From the launch onward, Medela aggressively promoted the Calma teat to healthcare workers and breastfeeding organizations, as well as to the general public. The Calma teat was promoted as being superior to other teats on the market because of its "uniqueness" in being similar to breastfeeding and for reducing difficulty in switching between the breast and bottle. There is no factual basis for such claims, which are made by many bottle manufacturers. To the extent that Medela states that the product claims are confirmed by research, there is no independent data to support this.

The breastfeeding community recognized that the introduction of the Calma teat created a significant conflict of interest and that continued partnerships and funding through Medela would constitute a violation of the Code as well as the policies of many of those organizations. Rather than withdraw from relationships that would place individuals and organizations in conflict with the Code as is their own manufacturer/distributor obligation, Medela continued its efforts to influence breastfeeding supporters, lactation researchers and clinicians through misleading marketing materials, sponsorship of conferences and educational programs and funding of lactation research. Stemming these conflicts of interest has consumed enormous resources within the field and served to sow discord within and between organizations.

Medela has over the years tried a number of approaches to continue to profit from the Calma teat while maintaining its lucrative relationships with breastfeeding organizations and lactation experts. (See appendix 1.) Their most recent “marketing guideline” still falls short when compared to their obligations to the Code, as outlined below:

Obligation	2023 Guideline
No advertising or promotion of products to the general public (WHA 34.22 - 5.1).	Statement refers to limits on marketing materials, which suggests they are not being eliminated.
No samples/free product to the public, healthcare workers or any part of the health-care system (WHA 34.22 - 5.2 & 5.4, WHA 39.28). Other sales inducements such as discounts or coupons are also prohibited (WHA 34.22 - 5.3).	Samples and free products through other programs are not addressed. Sales, coupons and other sales inducements not addressed. Medela also donates products in emergencies, in conflict with WHA63.23 and Ops Guidance.
No promotion of products or distribution of promotional materials in health care facilities (WHA 34.22 - 6.2 & 6.3).	Statement is limited to prohibiting the display of assembled storage bottles and teats.
Product information must be factual and scientific and provided only to healthcare professionals (WHA 34.22 - 7.2).	Statement refers to healthcare workers, not professionals and does not exclude the provision of this information on public pages or channels.
Company representatives should have no contact with parents or provide advice to parents (WHA 34.22 - 5.5).	Medela has multiple programs that directly and indirectly have contact with parents.
Companies should not sponsor conferences or scientific meetings (WHA 69.9).	Medela also continues to organize and fund, directly and indirectly, activities for healthcare workers. Disclosure as described in the statement does not resolve the conflict created by funding. Guidance closes states that Medela is “joining (the customer) in the mission” to support breastfeeding families.
No pictures of infants, or other pictures or text idealizing the use of breast-milk substitutes are permitted on the labels of the products (WHA 34.22 - 9.1).	Statement affirms that infants will be shown on product packaging and in other materials.
Brand identity must be separate (WHA 69.9).	There is no suggestion that the Calma teat will have its own brand identity or distinctive labelling.

* Pacifiers are not discussed in this statement and continue to be promoted on the Medela Canada website, which include claims. While pacifiers are not universally included in the category of Code-covered products, they are included in WHO’s latest model code legislation.

For clinicians and breastfeeding helpers, these latest changes, if implemented, are positive because they have the potential to make parent education easier, by removing false claims that have undermined breastfeeding by suggesting equivalency or an absence of bottle-feeding risk when using this specific product. Moreover, the Calma product is co-branded with breast pumps that are heavily marketed and have deep penetration in the healthcare system, so these changes will be particularly important ones for reducing the early misinformation that has a tendency to persist. The Calma teat is a premium-priced product, so the impact of removing the persuasive influence in packaging and other materials will be especially important from a health equity perspective.

However these changes do not alter Medela’s status in the funding of education, programs or other activities for health care workers, researchers or the general public. Medela remains a manufacturer and distributor of products covered by the Code and the OG-IFE. Approaching greater compliance with their obligations on product packaging and advertising claims does not remove the remaining obligations. There is no increased license to accept donations, sponsorship or other relationships with Medela, their subsidiaries or any other other manufacturer or distributor of Code-covered products as a result of this statement or the actions it commits to.

SafelyFed Canada will continue our practice of not partnering with or accepting funds from Medela or the Family Larsson Rosenquist Foundation.

For more resources on the Code or to contact us, please visit: <https://safelyfed.ca/code-resources/>

2008 - 2012

2008 statement: Dated Dec 1, 2008, first sourced online on Feb 11 2009. Medela US acknowledges they are now selling bottles and teats and refers to a "current interpretation" of the Code, and says they believe their actions support the intent of the Code. They say they "recognize and regret" their actions may be considered a Code violation. This statement, which was referenced as "talking points for sales" remained on the Medela US website until 2017.

Around this time, Medela US also launches "Mom Mavens" breastfeeding ambassadors program recruiting moms as influencers in exchange for early access to Medela products and other perks. Bottles and teats were among the products to be promoted directly to moms in direct violation of the Code, and the Mom Mavens were given similar talking points on the above 2008 statement in a March 2009 newsletter.

2009 statement: President Michael Larsson urges that Medela's dedication to breastfeeding be evaluated "not solely on Code compliance."

August 2009 - The Journal of Human Lactation, published by the International Lactation Consultants Association, confirms it does not accept monies from Medela after a review in March 2009 by the US National Alliance for Breastfeeding Advocacy documenting Code violations including "ads in parenting magazines market bottles and teats manufactured by Medela. Their Website included a "giveaway" of bottles and teats for mothers."

2012 - IBFAN's International Code Document Centre, inundated with inquiries about Medela's bottle and teat marketing and whether it is meeting its obligations under the Code, issues a press release "Yes, Medela violates the Code." The document is widely referenced in the face of the company's own assertions that it can and should continue its long-standing relationships and financial support of the breastfeeding community.

2012-2018

Medela continues in its assertions that it is above the Code through to 2018, and during this time it shifts from direct funding to the creation of a family foundation that is marketed as being "at arms length" from Medela.

2013/2014 - Family Larsson Rosenquist Foundation (FLRF) is launched, funded by Medela founder Olle Larsson and his sons Michael and Göran Larsson, and chaired by Medela CEO Michael Larsson. In 2014 its website appears with no references to Medela.

2015 - In September 2015 it is announced that Yale has received US\$680,000 in funding from FLRF for the Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly Project. It is reported the grant came because of a personal connection between lead researcher Rafael Pérez-Escamilla and FLRF program manager Janet Prince. (In 2021 Yale offered clarification about the relationship between FLRF and Medela and noted that the grant was a "one-off".)

2015 - In October 2015 in response to the Yale funding, IBFAN's ICDC reports that the Family Larsson Rosenquist Foundation owns Olle Larsson Holding, which in turn owns Medela.

2016 - International Lactation Consultants Association is asked to remove a Global Partners Initiative organization because the owner is also a wholesale distributor for Medela and the organization promotes the brand online, in clinic and at public events. At this time, several other international breastfeeding entities including WABA and LLL have one of the organization's owners in a senior leadership position.

2016 - FLRF and the International Society for Research in Human Milk and Lactation (ISRHML), under society president Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, launch their Trainee Expansion Program (TEP), "developed by ISRHML president elect Lars Bode" and FLRF's first employee Janet Prince. The program was launched at the March 2016 ISRHML conference in South Africa. Canadian researcher Dr. Meghan Azad is also noted as being instrumental in developing and managing the TEP program, which FLRF funds to provide research grants of up to \$100,000 and travel grants of up to \$10,000.

Feb/March 2017 - At some point between Feb 2 and Mar 5 2017, FLRF's website reflects that Michael Larsson has stepped aside as Chairman of the Family Larsson Rosenquist Foundation and his brother Göran Larsson has been appointed Chairman.

November 2017 - FLRF commits up to \$100M Swiss Francs over five years at the Global Nutrition Summit in Milan.

January 2018 - Yale receives a further US\$1.5M from the FLRF towards its Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly program.

May 2018 Medela Board President Michael Larsson issues "Medela's Commitment to the WHO Code" on May 2, 2018, stating "...while the WHO Code remains in its current form, we are working to ensure that we do not promote our bottles and teats" and concluding they "believe in placing the needs of mothers and babies above all else, honoring the true intent of the WHO Code".

June 2018 FLRF announces funding for research into breastfeeding in conflict settings in partnership with the Aga Khan University in Pakistan and the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. The announcement says "These research findings have the potential to help define new international standards."

2020-2023

2020 - Almost 2 years after their "Commitment to the WHO Code" announcement in 2018, on March 20, 2020, at the outset of the global Covid-19 pandemic Michael Larsson, President and Delegate of the Board of Directors and Annette Bruls, CEO Medela AG issue a letter on March 20, 2020, announce "New Marketing Guidelines."

June 2020: Medela joins the UN Global Compact and files a letter of commitment to report its progress annually. In September 2021 it files its first report on progress noting its focus on education and training for midwives and other hcps, along with provision of products related to vacuum-assisted delivery. It does not mention its commitment to the Code.

2021 - Medela's marketing guidelines addressing Code concerns are revised and re-launched alongside a program with a graphic element, a seal that they say will be include on relevant products to ensure customers know they are committed to the WHO's recommendations on breastfeeding. The graphic suggests a relationship with, if not endorsement by, the WHO and is misleading.

July 2022 - Medela Cares, a new corporate social responsibility program, is announced by CEO Annette Bruls, with a focus on its involvement in the UN Global Compact. In its second report on progress released in November 2022, Medela reports donations of funding and breastfeeding as well as breastmilk expression and pumping equipment to donor human milk banks and other recipients including to the US during its formula shortage crisis and to war-torn Ukraine and surrounding countries. This report is recalled after references to funding involving a UN NGO. The replacement report omits these references.

October/Dec 2022 - Medela funds a webinar series delivered by the European Milk Banking Association and Medela. The series on milk banking and donor human milk, includes two webinars addressing emergency settings 1 2.

Nov 2022 - FLRF's website now clearly acknowledges its corporate structure and relationships to Medela as reported by IBFAN seven years before.

2023 - Medela's newest Code-related commitments in the form of updated Marketing Guidelines are released August 2023. See this table of comparison between Medela's 2023, 2021 and 2020 Marketing Guidelines in Appendix 2.

2023	2021	2020
<p>(Commitment to Breastfeeding is now on a separate page)</p> <p>Marketing guidelines</p> <p>Facebook WhatsApp Twitter Pinterest LinkedIn</p> <p>Current work is underway to update our marketing efforts in order to meet our obligations under the World Health Organization's International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes (further referred to as International Code of International Code is a set of recommendations to regulate the marketing of human milk substitutes, feeding bottles and teats. This work is current and ongoing as part of our commitment to upholding our obligations to the International Code.</p> <p>Of critical significance to Medela, there will be no advertising or other forms of promotion to the general public of feeding bottles and teats.</p> <p>This means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medela will neither idealize bottle feeding (e.g., "Make breastfeeding simple, "Easiest way to feed," "Feeding was never so easy," etc.) nor make any statement that implies similarity with breastfeeding (e.g., "As good as breastfeeding", "Teats shaped just like the nipple of the mums"; "Close to natural breastfeeding", etc.). • Medela webpages and marketing materials related to feeding bottles and teats will only be factual and will not show images or idealized text. • Storage bottles with lids in the context of breast milk storage will be shown. Medela webpages related to feeding bottles and teats will not promote, advertise or suggest a useful or relevant products within our webpages. • Medela images of storage bottles with lids and expressed milk will be shown in context with expressing milk. • Medela will not show images of infants being bottle fed, or bottles with teats. Parents and infants will only be shown on packaging or Medela's owned channels in the context of breastfeeding or expressing human milk. • Medela will not provide, directly or indirectly, to pregnant women, mothers, or members of their family samples of products as outlined within the scope of the International Code. Samples of products within the scope of the International Code will not be provided to health workers except upon request for professional evaluation or research at the institutional level. • Medela will not use facilities of health care systems to display storage bottles assembled with teats. • Medela will disclose to the institution to which a recipient health worker is affiliated any contribution made to or on their behalf for fellowships, study tours, research grants, attendance at professional conferences, or the like, and will ensure that the recipient makes similar disclosures. <p>If you notice any non-compliance to our Medela marketing guidelines, please contact us via this email: marketingguidelines@medela.com.</p>	<p>Our commitment to breastfeeding</p> <p>New Marketing Guidelines</p> <p>Facebook WhatsApp Twitter Pinterest LinkedIn</p> <p>Medela is proud to have supported breastfeeding and human lactation since 1960. Human milk is not only key to a good start in life; it also provides an abundance of lifelong benefits. That is why our destiny at Medela is to enhance mother and baby health through the life-giving benefits of human milk. To fulfil our destiny, we have made it our goal to help every mother feed her baby human milk, everywhere in the world. To reinforce our commitment to the goals of the WHO code and to ensure that our offering of products and services for mums and babies always promotes the benefits of breastfeeding, we have developed new marketing guidelines that provide a framework for our communication activities:</p> <p>In-line with the WHO code, Medela will never support, commercialise or promote breastmilk substitutes.</p> <p>Breastfeeding is and remains an imperative to Medela. Through our pump range, supporting consumables (including feeding products) and services, we aim to help mothers and babies to achieve their breastfeeding goals and maintain long-term breastfeeding despite any periods in which they are separated. Therefore, Medela offers a complete range of alternative breast milk feeding methods, including bottles and teats, our Supplemental Nursing System, Special Needs Feeder and cups.</p> <p>All Medela communication materials whether written, audio, or visual, dealing with the feeding of infants and intended to reach pregnant women and mothers of infants and young children, will embody the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support of the WHO's recommendations on breastfeeding • Reinforcement of the benefits and superiority of breastfeeding vs formula feeding • Emphasis of Medela's goal for every baby to receive breast milk as long as possible. • Recognition of the impact that the introduction of formula feeding can have on maternal milk supply <p>We will bring this to life by displaying on all materials dealing with the feeding of infants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consistent and easily recognisable WHO breastfeeding recommendations support icon, stating "Supporting the WHO breastfeeding recommendations" • Next to this icon, there will be a link to a special area on our website: www.medela.com/WHO providing the following information: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Statement that Medela supports the WHO recommendation on breastfeeding duration – exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months with continued breastfeeding alongside other foods for 2 years and beyond as the best option for babies and their mothers. 2. Details on the recommendations, reinforcing the benefits and superiority of breastmilk vs formula. 3. Additional information on the impact that the introduction of formula feeding can have on maternal milk supply and explanation that feeding at the breast should be well established before introducing bottle feeding of breast milk. 4. Educational material supporting breastfeeding mums in achieving their breastfeeding goals and maintaining long-term breastfeeding. <p>There will be no advertising or other forms of promotion to the general public of feeding bottles and teats to the detriment of breastfeeding.</p> <p>This means that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All relevant materials will contain the icon and the web link as outlined above. • We do not idealise bottle-feeding (no use of statements next to bottles like: "Make breastfeeding simple", "Easiest way to feed", "Feeding was never so easy" etc) • We will not make any statement implying similarity with breastfeeding ("As good as breastfeeding", "Teats shaped just like the nipple of the mums"; "Close to natural breastfeeding" etc). • The materials related to teats and bottles will not show babies drinking from bottles. • Storage bottles with milk will be shown in context with pumping. <p>We will not provide, directly or indirectly, to pregnant women, mothers or members of their families, samples of products within the scope of the Code. Samples of products within the scope of the Code will not be provided to health workers except for the purpose of professional evaluation or research at the institutional level.</p> <p>Medela will not use facilities of health care systems to display products within the scope of the Code.</p> <p>Medela will disclose to the institution to which a recipient health worker is affiliated any contribution made to him or on his behalf for fellowships, study tours, research grants, attendance at professional conferences, or the like and will ensure that similar disclosures are made by the recipient.</p> <p>Breastfeeding will continue to be imperative to Medela, as we aim to help mothers and babies with their feeding journey, through our pump range, feeding products, essentials and services.</p> <p>If you notice any non-compliance to our Medela marketing guidelines, please contact us via this email: marketingguidelines@medela.com</p>	<p>Our commitment to the WHO recommendations on breastfeeding and the goals of the WHO Code</p> <p>We are one of the biggest supporters of breastfeeding amongst commercial companies and support wholeheartedly the recommendations of the WHO on breastfeeding. Furthermore, we are fully committed to the goals of the WHO Code. We steadily and resolutely support mothers, babies and families along their breastfeeding journey and clearly refrain from the promotion of breast milk substitutes.</p> <p>New Marketing Guidelines</p> <p>In addition, we have developed new marketing guidelines for materials dealing with feeding of infants, i.e. bottles and teats to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reinforce our support of the WHO recommendations on breastfeeding with a consistent and easily recognisable icon with a link to a dedicated webpage with detailed information for our customers 2. Ensure there will be no idealisation of bottle feeding in any of the marketing materials dealing with feeding bottles and teats. This means that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * we will not make any statement implying similarity with breastfeeding. * the materials related to teats and bottles will not show babies drinking from bottles * storage bottles with milk will be shown in context with pumping. <p>Please refer to the detailed guidelines on our website as they clearly reflect our commitment to breastfeeding mothers and provide a framework for our communication activities.</p> <p>We will continue to live up to our Destiny Statement to enhance mother and baby health through the life-giving benefits of human milk and to do all we can to enable mothers to breastfeed their babies as long as possible.</p> <p>Basel, Switzerland, 26 March 2020 Michael Larsson, President and Delegate of the Board of Directors Annette Brülls, CEO Medela AG</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Bold Black: same/similar in 2020, 2021 & 2023</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Violet: absent in 2023</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Blue: new in 2023</p>		