



**UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
World Breastfeeding Week 2017 Message**

Virtually every country around the world observes World Breastfeeding Week each year for good reason: breastfeeding is one of the smartest investments that a country, a community and a family can make.

The theme of this year's World Breastfeeding Week is "**Sustaining Breastfeeding Together**," because all of us—governments, decision-makers, development partners, professional bodies, academia, media, advocates and other stakeholders—must work together to strengthen existing partnerships and forge new ways to invest in and support breastfeeding for a more sustainable future.

Breastfeeding helps provides children everywhere with the healthiest start to life. It acts as the child's first vaccine by providing antibodies. It contributes to healthy growth and development, protecting children during their critical first two years, as well as later in life. And breastfeeding also benefits mothers, decreasing their risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and diabetes.

Breastfeeding is good not only for mothers and babies. It is critical for achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals. It improves nutrition (SDG2), prevents child mortality and decreases the risk of noncommunicable diseases (SDG3), and supports cognitive development and education (SDG4). Breastfeeding is also an enabler to ending poverty, promoting economic growth and reducing inequalities.

It also benefits national economies, by helping lower health care costs, increase educational attainment and, ultimately, boost productivity. Indeed, breastfeeding is one of the most cost effective investments available. Every dollar invested in supporting breastfeeding generates an estimated US\$35 dollars in economic returns across lower and middle-income countries.¹ By contrast, low breastfeeding rates translate into billions of dollars' worth of lost productivity and health care costs to treat preventable illnesses and chronic diseases.

Recognizing the crucial role of breastfeeding in global health and development, in 2012, the 194 countries of the World Health Assembly committed to a target of increasing the global rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life from a baseline of 37 per cent to 50 per cent by 2025. Subsequently, the United Nations proclaimed a Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025), inviting countries to implement a Framework for Action that includes a number of measures in support of breastfeeding.

Rapid progress is possible with investments in policies and programmes that better support a woman's decision to breastfeed and ensure that more of the world's children have the opportunity to thrive.

¹ Walters, D., Eberwein, J.D., Sullivan, L., D'Alimonte, M., and Shekar, M. "An Investment Framework for Meeting the Global Nutrition Target for Breastfeeding" 2016. The World Bank Group.
https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/26069/Breast_4_web.pdf

Consequently, UNICEF and WHO have come together with 20 prominent international agencies and non-governmental organizations to form the Global Breastfeeding Collective, to be launched on August 1, the first day of World Breastfeeding Week. The Collective is calling on governments, donors and other stakeholders to advance policies and programmes to enable more mothers to breastfeed.

These policies and programmes include: enforcing the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes so that breast-milk substitute companies cannot mislead women; strengthening policy provisions that support family leave and breastfeeding in the workplace to encourage more working mothers to breastfeed their babies; improving the quality of maternity care to provide new mothers with breastfeeding support; increasing access to skilled breastfeeding counselling in the health system; fostering community networks that support women in breastfeeding; strengthening information systems to track progress towards the global goal of increasing breastfeeding; and increasing funding to protect, promote and support breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding is not a one woman job. Mothers need assistance and support from their health care providers, families, employers, communities and governments so they can provide their children with the healthiest start to life. Together, we can support women to breastfeed and protect the health and well-being of future generations.

Sincerely,



Mr. Anthony Lake

UNICEF Executive Director



Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

WHO Director-General