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EM DEBATE

The new board of directors of Cebes: Forward for democracy and the right to health

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IN 2026, THE BRAZILIAN CENTER FOR HEALTH STUDIES (CEBES) WILL COMPLETE 50 YEARS of existence. Born in the struggle against the military dictatorship that dominated Brazil between 1964 and 1985, Cebes was at the origins of the Health Reform Movement, actively participating in the fight for democracy and the right to health[1].

Cebes remains in the uncompromising defense of the right to health established in the 1988 Constitution, the most significant social achievement in Brazilian democratic history. The full realization of this right still requires many advances – and it is up to Cebes, as it has always been, to criticize the political, technical, and social impediments to its implementation. For Cebes, health is more than the absence of disease; it is a set of economic, political, social, and cultural conditions that require health care centered on the social, physical, and mental well-being of the population, in which everyone can live with dignity, without exclusion, discrimination or violence. Building a nation with full health also means building justice, solidarity, peace, democracy, and sovereignty. These principles are expressed in our motto, 'Health is a democracy, democracy is health,' which is renewed with the new board for the 2025-2026 term.

Elected during the biannual Cebes Symposium in Fortaleza in November 2024, the new board takes on the challenges discussed during the Symposium, with Cebianos from all over the Country[2].

In the conception embraced by our entity, health concentrates and evidences a good part of the bottlenecks that hinder our path in constructing a nation of well-being in tune with the parameters of civilization and human dignity. In this sense, it is necessary to put health back at the center of the national debate based on its relationship with social, economic, and environmental needs.

One of the challenges is to invest vigorously in knowledge about the relationships between health and ecology and climate, not only in local terms but also at regional and planetary levels, valuing the contribution of native peoples in constructing harmonious forms of coexistence and reintegration of humanity with nature. We defend the right of Indigenous peoples to their territories and ways of life while denouncing the insatiable economic model of the destruction of human resources and nature and defending a development model centered on life and socio-biodiversity.

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Health has demonstrated its importance in economic dynamics – not only because of the capacity of social policies to leverage productive activity, stimulating the growth of the domestic market and employment, but also because it participated in the Country's scientific, technological, and industrial development. Policies in this field must be encouraged, with refined criteria on their benefits for the population, to avoid financing exclusively private interests or those contrary to national interests of reducing national dependence and expanding our sovereignty. Brazilian health can participate as a relevant actor in expanding the frontiers of knowledge and the national production of medicines, vaccines, biopharmaceuticals, diagnostic tests, prostheses, equipment, and software.

In the field of health care, Cebes will remain steadfast in its knowledge and criticism of the dynamics of appropriation of the Unified Health System (SUS) by private and particularist interests. On the one hand, the neoliberals defend the removal of the constitutional health floor in order to achieve such a supposed fiscal balance and, on the other hand, support tax exemptions and the maintenance of the highest accurate interest rates in the world, undermining fundamental resources for the harmonious development of our society. They take over the resources of the SUS – either by the significant increase in parliamentary amendments, whose destination responds more to political than technical interests[3,4], or by the expansion of the sale of services through private institutes without social control, transparency and with doubtful impacts on the quality and comprehensiveness of care. In addition, the harm of the concentration of the private health insurance market[5] is well known, which continues to be self-regulating, with or without the National Supplementary Health Agency (ANS), leaving patients and families in the lurch. It is necessary to fight austerity that presents itself only for the population's needs but never for particularist interests, inefficient and unnecessary subsidies, and exemptions to the private sector.

The current government has taken important initiatives to defend the quality of care and improve SUS services. This effort must be continued and deepened by guaranteeing adequate and safe resources, protection and encouragement for workers, humanized and integrated services, and investments in services and technology based on current and future needs. The institutional structure of the SUS requires constant attention, with the expansion of cooperative and coordinated federalism, regionalization, and the strengthening of social participation. A strong and public SUS is the answer and the way to defend health.

The fight against the welfare state advocated by neoliberalism has already shown its failure. His promises in these 50 years have not been fulfilled. The world has not improved the allocation of resources, and the efficiency of the market has not generated well-being or improved the quality of life of populations. In its new version, associated with the extreme right, neoliberalism is supported by the weakening of democracy, overcoming the sovereign institutions of states, and conservative setbacks of all kinds. Advancing in labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and the concentration of wealth requires weakening social and solidarity bonds by exacerbating individualism – and controlling bodies, desires, and affections. Our conception of health threatens these goals, so we remain confident of our commitment.

Brazil's and Brazilian health also play a crucial role in the international scenario, defending humanitarian values and promoting public systems and universal access to health as an inalienable human right and condition of full citizenship. Cebes is part of this effort to internationalize the right to health. It will hold, in August 2025, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the XVIII Congress of the Latin American Association of Social Medicine (Alames) in celebration of its 40th anniversary. It will be a strategic moment for us to evaluate Latin America's health

systems and articulate joint actions that transcend the continent for global development efforts that prioritize well-being, well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

The following two years will be of intense work. We will pay special attention to the financial sustainability of Cebes, membership expansion, and generational renewal, incorporating new themes into the political and academic debate. We will strengthen our activities as a Study Center, improving our analysis and formulation role while maintaining and expanding our ties with civil society and the population.

We continue together.

Long live Cebes!

Collaborators

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