RCMOS – Revista Científica Multidisciplinar O Saber.
ISSN: 2675-9128. São Paulo - SP.
Year VII, v.1 2026 | Submission: 06/20/2026 | Accepted: 06/23/2026 | Publication: 06/26/2026

Public Policies on Food and Health Promotion in the Prevention of Childhood Obesity in Brazil: An Integrative Review

Políticas públicas de alimentação e promoção da saúde na prevenção da obesidade infantil no Brasil: uma revisão integrativa

Políticas públicas de alimentación y promoción de la salud en la prevención de la obesidad infantil en Brasil: una revisión integradora

Sabrina Souza dos Santos Melo – Faculdade Ages
Prof. Msc. Juliana Malinovski – Faculdade Ages - Orientadora
Káren Arielle Carvalho Barreto – Faculdade Ages - Co-orientadora

Abstract:
Introduction: Childhood obesity is one of the main public health problems today, being associated with biological, behavioral, social, economic, and environmental factors that directly impact the health and quality of life of children. In this context, public policies on food and health promotion play a fundamental role in preventing excess weight and in the formation of healthy habits from childhood. Objective: To analyze the role of public policies on food and health promotion in the prevention of childhood obesity in Brazil. Methodology: This is an integrative literature review, of a descriptive and exploratory nature, carried out through searches in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and National Library of Medicine (PubMed) databases. Primary studies published between 2022 and 2026, in Portuguese and English, that addressed the proposed theme were included. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, five studies were selected for analysis. Results: The results showed that public policies aimed at promoting healthy eating, food and nutrition education, and encouraging physical activity contribute significantly to the prevention of childhood obesity. The importance of integrated action between family, school, and health services was highlighted, as well as the need for intersectoral strategies to increase the effectiveness of actions. In addition, it was observed that factors such as the high consumption of ultra-processed foods, socioeconomic inequalities, and difficulties in implementing programs and public policies represent challenges to tackling childhood obesity. Conclusion: It is concluded that strengthening public policies on food and health promotion is essential for the prevention of childhood obesity, and it is necessary to expand educational actions, strengthen intersectoral coordination, and promote environments conducive to the adoption of healthy habits. The importance of the nutritionist's role in health promotion, food and nutrition education, and the development of preventive actions aimed at children and their families is also highlighted.

Keywords:
Childhood obesity; Public policies; Health promotion; Healthy eating; Food and nutrition education.

Resumo:
Introdução: A obesidade infantil constitui um dos principais problemas de saúde pública da atualidade, estando associada a fatores biológicos, comportamentais, sociais, econômicos e ambientais que impactam diretamente a saúde e a qualidade de vida das crianças. Nesse contexto, as políticas públicas de alimentação e promoção da saúde desempenham papel fundamental na prevenção do excesso de peso e na formação de hábitos saudáveis desde a infância. Objetivo: Analisar o papel das políticas públicas de alimentação e promoção da saúde na prevenção da obesidade infantil no Brasil. Metodologia: Trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura, de caráter descritivo e exploratório, realizada por meio de buscas nas bases de dados Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) e National Library Of Medicine

(PubMed). Foram incluídos estudos primários publicados entre 2022 e 2026, nos idiomas português e inglês, que abordassem a temática proposta. Após a aplicação dos critérios de inclusão e exclusão, foram selecionados cinco estudos para análise. Resultados: Os resultados evidenciaram que as políticas públicas voltadas à promoção da alimentação saudável, à educação alimentar e nutricional e ao incentivo à prática de atividade física contribuem significativamente para a prevenção da obesidade infantil. Destacaram-se a importância da atuação integrada entre família, escola e serviços de saúde, bem como a necessidade de estratégias intersetoriais para ampliar a efetividade das ações. Além disso, observou-se que fatores como o elevado consumo de alimentos ultraprocessados, as desigualdades socioeconômicas e as dificuldades na implementação de programas e políticas públicas representam desafios para o enfrentamento da obesidade infantil. Conclusão: Conclui-se que o fortalecimento das políticas públicas de alimentação e promoção da saúde é essencial para a prevenção da obesidade infantil, sendo necessário ampliar ações educativas, fortalecer a articulação intersetorial e promover ambientes favoráveis à adoção de hábitos saudáveis. Destaca-se ainda a importância da atuação do nutricionista na promoção da saúde, na educação alimentar e nutricional e no desenvolvimento de ações preventivas voltadas às crianças e suas famílias.

Palavras-chave:
Obesidade infantil; Políticas públicas; Promoção da saúde; Alimentação saudável; Educação alimentar e nutricional.

Resumen:
Introducción: La obesidad infantil constituye uno de los principales problemas de salud pública de la actualidad y está asociada a factores biológicos, conductuales, sociales, económicos y ambientales que repercuten directamente en la salud y la calidad de vida de los niños. En este contexto, las políticas públicas de alimentación y promoción de la salud desempeñan un papel fundamental en la prevención del exceso de peso y en la formación de hábitos saludables desde la infancia. Objetivo: Analizar el papel de las políticas públicas de alimentación y promoción de la salud en la prevención de la obesidad infantil en Brasil. Metodología: Se trata de una revisión integradora de la literatura, de carácter descriptivo y exploratorio, realizada mediante búsquedas en las bases de datos Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) y National Library of Medicine (PubMed). Se incluyeron estudios primarios publicados entre 2022 y 2026, en portugués e inglés, que abordaran la temática propuesta. Tras la aplicación de los criterios de inclusión y exclusión, se seleccionaron cinco estudios para el análisis. Resultados: Los resultados evidenciaron que las políticas públicas dirigidas a promover la alimentación saludable, la educación alimentaria y nutricional y el incentivo a la práctica de actividad física contribuyen significativamente a la prevención de la obesidad infantil. Se destacó la importancia de la actuación integrada entre la familia, la escuela y los servicios de salud, así como la necesidad de estrategias intersectoriales para ampliar la efectividad de las acciones. Además, se observó que factores como el elevado consumo de alimentos ultraprocesados, las desigualdades socioeconómicas y las dificultades en la implementación de programas y políticas públicas representan desafíos para afrontar la obesidad infantil. Conclusión: Se concluye que el fortalecimiento de las políticas públicas de alimentación y promoción de la salud es esencial para la prevención de la obesidad infantil, siendo necesario ampliar las acciones educativas, fortalecer la articulación intersectorial y promover entornos favorables para la adopción de hábitos saludables. También se destaca la importancia de la actuación del nutricionista en la promoción de la salud, la educación alimentaria y nutricional y el desarrollo de acciones preventivas dirigidas a los niños y sus familias.

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Palabras clave:
Obesidad infantil; Políticas públicas; Promoción de la salud; Alimentación saludable; Educación alimentaria y nutricional.

INTRODUCTION

Obesity is an excess of adiposity, defined as a chronic disease in which there is an abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat in adipose tissue, to such an extent that it compromises health, and is commonly diagnosed through anthropometric indicators, such as the Body Mass Index (BMI) for age, and according to the growth curves proposed by the World Health Organization (Cuppari , L., 2019).

The following is a standardized table with the cut-off points used by SISVAN, valid for children and adolescents aged 5 to 10 years, adapted from the WHO reference curves. Nutritional status assessment is performed using Z-scores of the body mass index for age (BMI/A), which allow classification into underweight, normal weight, overweight, obesity, and severe obesity. In addition, the analysis can be complemented by anthropometric indicators, such as waist circumference and waist-to-height ratio, considered important for identifying cardiometabolic risk in adolescents due to their association with abdominal fat accumulation (Brazilian Society of Pediatrics). This condition is associated with an increased risk of disease (Neri, Mattar, Yonamine, 2017).

Figure 1 - Classification of nutritional status by BMI-for-age (5 to 10 years)

VALORES CRÍTICOS		DIAGNÓSTICO NUTRICIONAL
< Percentil 0,1	< Escore-z -3	Magreza acentuada
≥ Percentil 0,1 e < Percentil 3	≥ Escore-z -3 e < Escore-z -2	Magreza
≥ Percentil 3 e ≤ Percentil 85	≥ Escore-z -2 e ≤ Escore-z +1	Eutrofia
> Percentil 85 e ≤ Percentil 97	≥ Escore-z +1 e ≤ Escore-z +2	Sobrepeso
> Percentil 97 e ≤ Percentil 99,9	≥ Escore-z +2 e ≤ Escore-z +3	Obesidade
> Percentil 99,9	> Escore-z +3	Obesidade grave

Source: Ministry of Health. SISVAN – Food and Nutritional Surveillance System. WHO Growth Curves (2006/2007).

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In the context of public health, public policies play a fundamental role in promoting health and preventing illness, with particular emphasis on food and nutrition policies, which aim to guarantee the human right to adequate food and promote healthy eating practices (BRAZIL, 2026).

Childhood obesity, in children aged 5 to 9 years, is one of the main public health problems today, being considered a chronic and multifactorial metabolic disease (International Classification of Diseases, ICD-10, code E66), in which, in addition to nutritional factors, genetic, metabolic, psychosocial, cultural, and other aspects play a role in its origin and maintenance (Cuppari , L., 2019). The most frequent comorbidities in childhood and adolescence are dyslipidemia, systemic arterial hypertension (SAH), insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes mellitus (DM2), hepatic steatosis, and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) (Neri, Mattar, Yonamine, 2017).

The phases characterized as preschool (children before primary school, aged 2 to 6 years) and school age (transition to adolescence, children aged 7 to 10 years) are marked by dietary transitions (Rossi; Poltronieri, 2024). In the 2-6 year age group, children have a very varied diet; offering their favorite foods can hinder nutritional education strategies, especially when these foods are ultra-processed (Rossi; Poltronieri, 2024). In contrast, in the second phase, the child becomes somewhat more independent and has a more sociable and active life (Rossi; Poltronieri, 2024). In this phase, the school plays an essential role in promoting physical health, as well as being a strategic space for the nutritional education process (Rossi; Poltronieri, 2024).

In this sense, according to the book by Luciana Rossi and Fabiana Poltronieri, 2024, the National Food and Nutrition Policy (PNAN) presents strategies such as the School Health Program (PSE) and the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) as important instruments for tackling childhood obesity, especially through food and nutrition education actions and the promotion of healthy environments, through various strategies such as promoting healthy eating, regulating food advertising aimed at children, offering balanced meals in the school environment, and developing food and nutrition education actions (Rossi; Poltronieri 2024). These interventions are essential for the formation of healthy eating habits from childhood, contributing to the reduction of risk factors associated with excess weight (Rossi; Poltronieri 2024).

Among these, the following stand out: insufficient intersectoral coordination, low adherence to proposed actions, the influence of the food industry, and socioeconomic inequalities, which hinder access to adequate and healthy food (Freire, 2025). These factors contribute to the

persistence and worsening of childhood obesity, highlighting gaps that need to be better understood and addressed (Freire, 2025).

Epidemiological data highlight the magnitude of the problem; according to the World Health Organization, the number of overweight children has increased significantly in recent decades worldwide (BRAZIL, 2019). In Brazil, studies indicate a continuous increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity in children, reflecting changes in dietary patterns, characterized by increased consumption of ultra-processed foods and reduced intake of *unprocessed foods* , in addition to decreased levels of physical activity (FIOCRUZ, 2024).

“Ultra-processed foods are increasingly replacing fruits, vegetables and proteins, precisely when nutrition plays a critical role in children’s growth, cognitive development and mental health,” says Catherine Russell, executive director of UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund). (Freire, 2025)

According to records from the Ministry of Health, national data shows that in the 5-9 year age group, 29.3% are overweight, indicating that 3 out of every 10 children aged 5 to 9 are overweight in the country (BRAZIL, 2019). According to the World Obesity Atlas and the World Health Organization (WHO), Brazil will be in 5th position in the ranking of countries with the highest number of obese children and adolescents in 2030, with only a 2% chance of reversing this situation if nothing is done (BRAZIL, 2019).

Given this scenario, the relevance of the topic to public health and to the role of the nutritionist becomes evident, as this professional is essential in promoting adequate and healthy eating and in developing strategies to prevent childhood obesity (BRAZIL, 2019). Understanding the role of public policies in this context is fundamental to supporting more effective and integrated practices in the healthcare of the child population. This includes actions promoting programs such as the School Health Program (PSE) and the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), which seeks adequate and healthy nutrition (PNAN, 2013). The nutritionist's role is essential in the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity, promoting appropriate dietary guidelines and encouraging changes in the lifestyle habits of the child and their family. Family participation is a determining factor in the adoption and maintenance of healthy behaviors, contributing to better results in controlling excess weight (VERGA *et al* ., 2022).

Therefore, the present study aims to analyze, in light of the most recent scientific evidence, the role of public policies on food and health promotion in the prevention of childhood obesity in Brazil.

METHODOLOGY

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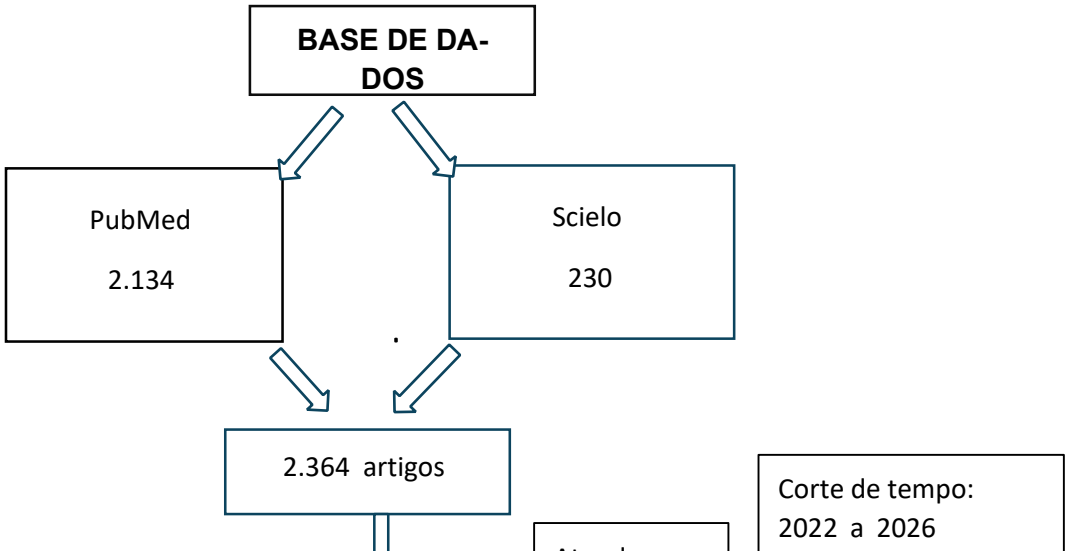
This study is characterized as an integrative literature review, descriptive and exploratory in nature, whose objective is to answer the following guiding question: "What are the roles of public policies on food and health promotion in the prevention of childhood obesity in Brazil?"

Scientific database. The Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and US National Library (PubMed) were used. Standardized descriptors were used, combined with Boolean operators, AND and OR. The keywords used during the database search were: "Childhood Obesity"; "Public Policies"; "Health Promotion"; "Brazil"; "Healthy Eating". The terms in English were used for this research.

Primary studies published between 2022 and 2026 were included, with the aim of ensuring the updating of scientific evidence, available in Portuguese and English, and studies that addressed public policies, nutrition, and childhood obesity in the Brazilian context. Duplicate studies, studies that did not directly address the proposed theme, incomplete works, studies outside the defined time frame, and duplicate studies were excluded.

Data collection was carried out in six stages: initially, the guiding question was defined; then, the databases were chosen; next, the search strategies were defined; subsequently, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied; the titles and abstracts of the identified studies were read; and finally, the selected articles were read in full, extracting the data relevant to the research.

Figure 2. Descriptive flowchart of the literature review research process for this article.



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Table 1, described below, compiles the most significant results from each scientific article selected in the research, as well as authors, type of study, year of publication, study location, sample, objectives, methodology, and results. The 5 articles are primary studies published in national and international journals, conducted in Brazil, Spain, the United States, and Australia.

Table 1. Summary of articles analyzed for review.

Article	**Author, year, location of the study**	**Study design, type of study and N**	**Objectives**	**Methodology**	**Key findings**

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1	Gooey *et al.* 2024 Australia	Study qualitative; N = 15 (9 general practitioners, 4 nurses, and 2 clinic managers)	Exploring the perceptions and experiences of professionals from the attention primary, Regarding the prevention of childhood obesity in general clinical practice	Semi- structured interviews thematic analysis based on ecological model of health	It was found that although professionals recognize the importance of promoting healthy habits and monitoring children's growth, there is little structure and institutional support for preventive actions. It highlights the need to overcome implementation gaps and promote changes outside the clinic that support healthy behaviors.
2	Heerma W 2023 USA	Clinical tri randomize595 N= children	Evaluate the association between the initial consumption of ultra-processed foods in early childhood and the Z-score of Child's BMI over 36 months.	Evaluate the association between the initial consumption of ultra-processed foods and children's BMI-Z over time. It tested an obesity prevention intervention.	The study evaluated children from low-income families at higher risk for obesity and analyzed the relationship between the consumption of ultra-processed foods. (AUPs) and body mass index for age (BMI-z). Children who consumed higher amounts of ultra-processed foods They had a diet with poorer nutritional quality, characterized by higher energy intake and lower density of nutrients important for healthy growth.
3	Verga, SMP *et al* 2022 Brazil	Study qualitative N= 26 informants	Understanding the influence of family on the formation of childhood habits	Semi-structured interviews as with content analysis	The dietary changes needed to address childhood obesity require transformations that involve the entire family dynamic, not just the child.

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4	LarruyGarcía , A. *et al.* 2026 Spain	Multicenter clinical trial, parallel, randomized N=170 children, being 12 months of clinical trials	This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness and efficacy of a Mediterranean lifestyle intervention in preventing the increase of... adiposity in children preschoolers at risk of obesity after 1 year of intervention	THE recruitment of participants It happened in hospitals, health centers and schools located in the areas provided by Primary Health Care centers, and conducted directly by researchers or responsible professionals.	The children who participated in intervention They showed improvement in body composition, indicating a lower tendency towards excessive accumulation of body fat. There was improvement in risk factors. cardiovascular, suggesting early metabolic benefits resulting from the adoption of healthy habits.
5	Bortolini *et al.* 2023 Brazil	Qualitative documentary study N = Not applicable apply documents officials, reports technical and bases national data related to the Strategy PROTECT.	This article describes the steps of strategy, encompassing operational planning, the overall proposal, evaluation processes, and the accompany me tasks performed by the coordination technique of Ministry of Health Brazil.	The information was obtained through reports public accountability previously cited. The System Brazilian Surveillance Feed and Nutritional, along with related national research Regarding the topic, it served as a fundamental basis. for the preparation of strategy	This study highlighted the need to develop a national strategy focused on preventing childhood obesity, considering the increasing prevalence of overweight in the child population and the importance of integrated actions to promote health, adequate nutrition, and encourage physical activity.

Source: Developed by the authors, 2026.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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The studies analyzed presented a variety of approaches, including Two qualitative studies **,** a randomized clinical trial, a multicenter, parallel, randomized clinical trial, and a qualitative documentary study, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the role of public food and health promotion policies in preventing childhood obesity, as well as the factors that influence their implementation and effectiveness.

The studies analyzed show that public policies on food and health promotion play a fundamental role in preventing childhood obesity, especially when associated with strategies for nutritional education, encouraging physical activity, and strengthening intersectoral collaboration between health, school, and family. The findings in this review reinforce that childhood obesity is a multifactorial problem, influenced not only by inadequate eating habits but also by social, cultural, economic, and family factors.

In the qualitative study conducted by Gooey *et al.* (2024), in Australia, with 15 primary health care professionals, observed that doctors, nurses, and managers recognize the importance of promoting healthy habits and monitoring child growth in obesity prevention. However, the authors highlighted difficulties related to a lack of institutional support, limited resources, and the absence of an adequate structure for implementing preventive actions. These findings demonstrate that, although public policies aimed at health promotion exist, their effectiveness is often compromised by operational failures and insufficient coordination between the sectors involved. This result reinforces the need to strengthen Primary Health Care and increase investments in preventive actions, especially in the context of children.

Similarly, Bortolini *et al.* (2023), in a documentary study conducted in Brazil, highlighted the need for the construction of integrated national strategies for the prevention of childhood obesity, considering the increasing prevalence of overweight among Brazilian children. The study emphasized the relevance of the Food and Nutrition Surveillance System (SISVAN) and national research as important instruments to assist in public actions promoting healthy eating and encouraging physical activity. The authors emphasize that isolated public policies have less impact, making the development of continuous, articulated strategies adapted to the social reality of the population indispensable.

The findings of Verga *et al.* (2022), in a qualitative study conducted in Brazil with 26 participants, demonstrated that the family environment exerts a strong influence on the formation of children's eating habits. The authors identified that changes in parental eating behavior and greater family involvement are essential factors in addressing childhood obesity. This result shows that obesity prevention depends not only on the child, but also on the family context in which they are embedded. Therefore, food and nutrition education strategies directed at

families can promote healthier food choices and reduce the consumption of ultra-processed foods in the home environment.

Reinforcing these findings, a randomized clinical trial conducted by Heerma W. (2023) in the United States, involving 595 children, identified an association between high consumption of ultra-processed foods in early childhood and higher BMI Z-scores over 36 months. The study demonstrated that frequent intake of these foods was present across different childhood age groups, reinforcing the relationship between inadequate dietary patterns and increased risk of obesity. These results can be explained by the high sugar, saturated fat, and sodium content found in ultra-processed foods, as well as the low nutritional density of these products. This evidence reinforces the importance of public policies aimed at reducing the consumption of ultra-processed foods and encouraging the consumption of *whole, unprocessed foods* from the earliest years of life.

Furthermore, Larruy -García, A. *et al.* (2026), in a multicenter clinical trial conducted in Spain with 170 preschool children, evaluated the effects of an intervention based on the Mediterranean lifestyle, including healthy eating and physical activity. The results demonstrated a positive influence of the intervention on body composition and cardiovascular risk factors in children predisposed to obesity due to family history. These findings indicate that early interventions, associated with the promotion of healthy habits and encouragement of physical activity, can significantly reduce the risks related to childhood obesity and improve the quality of life of children.

When relating the analyzed studies, a consensus is observed among the authors regarding the importance of preventive actions initiated in childhood, especially through food and nutrition education. It was also possible to identify that strategies involving schools, families, and health services are more effective in tackling childhood obesity. However, some studies point to important limitations, such as difficulties in implementing public policies, low family adherence to educational actions, and the influence of the ultra-processed food industry on children's eating habits.

The studies analyzed demonstrated the importance of public policies on food and health promotion in preventing childhood obesity; however, they presented methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes, possible response biases, and the use of secondary sources. The need for a multidisciplinary approach, involving health, education, and social assistance, was also highlighted, although few studies have explored the specific role of nutritionists, pointing to a gap in the literature. Furthermore, social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors directly influence the effectiveness of these policies, especially in vulnerable populations. The

results reinforce that integrated strategies, combining food education, nutritional monitoring, physical activity, and the participation of families and schools, are fundamental for promoting health and preventing childhood obesity.

Thus, the results of this integrative review show that public policies on food and health promotion play an essential role in preventing childhood obesity in Brazil. Programs such as the School Health Program (PSE) and the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) represent important instruments for promoting healthy habits and preventing excess weight. However, it is necessary to strengthen the implementation of these strategies, expand educational actions aimed at families, and ensure greater coordination between the different sectors involved in child health care.

CONCLUSION

This integrative review allowed us to understand the relevance of public policies on food and health promotion in the prevention of childhood obesity, highlighting that actions focused on food and nutrition education, encouraging physical activity, and strengthening intersectoral collaboration are fundamental to addressing this important public health problem. The studies analyzed demonstrated that childhood obesity has a multifactorial character, being influenced by biological, family, social, economic, and environmental factors, which reinforces the need for broad, continuous strategies adapted to the different realities of the population.

Furthermore, it was observed that early interventions, associated with the active participation of families, schools, and health services, show positive results in promoting healthy habits and reducing risk factors related to excess weight. In this context, the role of the nutritionist stands out, whose activities aim to develop in parents, children, and adolescents an interest in the importance of nutrition in the treatment and prevention of obesity, promote healthy eating habits, encourage the exchange of information, identify difficulties related to treatment, and complement individual care.

In conclusion, public policies are indispensable tools for preventing childhood obesity; however, their effectiveness depends on strengthening intersectoral actions, expanding access to information, and promoting environments conducive to the adoption of healthy habits. Nutritional education in childhood should be understood as an important strategy for preventing diseases throughout life, as it contributes to the child's proper growth and development. Therefore, investing in actions aimed at children means promoting better health conditions for future generations and contributing to the construction of a healthier society.

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