# 50 years of the journal 'Saúde em Debate': Trench of critical thinking and political weapon of the Health Reform

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**THE BIRTH OF THE JOURNAL 'SAÚDE EM DEBATE', IN 1976, MUST BE UNDERSTOOD** in the context of the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985). It was under the so-called 'years of lead' – of repression, censorship, dismissals, exiles and torture – that Brazilian public health reached one of its most dramatic points of deterioration: the exclusion of the majority of the population from medical and health care, the worsening of the quality of services and the precipitous drop in health indicators. In addition, the then National Institute of Medical Assistance of Social Security (INAMPS), responsible for medical care, was privatized from within, distributing contracts to the private hospital network amid successive corruption scandals. It was precisely in this precarious terrain that a fruitful movement of resistance to the regime flourished within public universities and in the departments of preventive and social medicine. Through teaching-care projects involving teachers, students, and service professionals, health criticism became political criticism of the authoritarian regime, linking health to democracy, social justice, and the fight against inequalities.

This movement, inspired by the theory of the Social Determination of Health, a tributary of Latin American thought – of authors such as Juan César García and of the so-called Latin American social medicine – sought to break with the biologizing and individualizing reading of disease to affirm health as a product of the mode of production, class relations and structural inequalities. Management experiences such as those of Londrina (PR), Niterói (RJ) and Montes Claros (MG) converted this theory into concrete practice for the organization of services, accumulating a political heritage that, a few years later, inspired the very project of the Brazilian Health Reform and, consequently, of the Unified Health System (SUS).

It was in this broth of resistance that, in June 1976, during the 28th Annual Meeting of the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), inspired by initiatives such as the 'Revista Médico-Social' and the 'Revista Brasileira de Medicina Pública', the idea of creating a journal was born to be a means of disseminating critical thinking in health, analyzing its historical evolution and the institutional form assumed by the health sector in Brazil, reaffirming the inseparable relationship between health, social class and inequality[1]. In other words, it was an editorial project clearly associated with the democratic and progressive political field.

Four months later, in October 1976, the first issue of the journal 'Saúde em Debate' was launched, in full force of AI-5. David Capistrano, one of the journal's creators, said, holding the first printed copy: "*this journal is our first victory; it will cause great transformations*". The phrase was not rhetoric of launch. In fact, the journal became an important and decisive instrument for the dissemination not only of innovative and critical ideas in the field of health, but also constituted a mechanism for political mobilization, as the relaunch of the issues was

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carried out in several states of the country, with discussions and debates on health problems and proposals for confronting them, based on the articles and editorials published in it. The proposals related not only to service reform and administrative reorganization of the sector, but also to expanding the concept of health, the notion of health as a right, and the certainty that the concepts of health and democracy were inseparable[2].

To circulate, the journal needed a legal entity to support it. In this context, the Brazilian Center for Health Studies (CEBES) was founded and has since shaped the journal's political direction. In this case, it was not the entity that created a vehicle for dissemination, but the journal that gave rise to the entity, which, since its origins, has positioned itself critically in different conjunctures of national politics, such as in the 'Diretas Já!', in the transition to democracy, in the Constituent Assembly, in the economic and health crises, in the dilemmas of the health sector and in recurrent moments of threat to democracy itself, through editorials and articles published in the journal, evidencing a harmony between the subjects addressed and the national reality.

It is important to highlight the participation of CEBES and the journal in discussions before and during the 8th National Health Conference (CNS). So much so that the 17th issue of the journal 'Saúde em Debate', with the title 'For a democratic health policy', published in 1985, was republished as an insert of the 8th CNS, held in 1986. This issue publishes several texts from meetings and debates held by civil society entities, unions, and associations, with proposals on what should be considered in reforms to the country's health sector, which was in a period of transition to democracy.

Fleury, Bahia and Amarante[3(6)] gathered, in the book entitled 'Saúde em Debate: fundamentos da Reforma Sanitária', 30 texts published in the journal between 1977 and 1988. In the presentation, they state that "the first 20 issues of Saúde em Debate [...] contain an invaluable treasure: there are the foundations of the Health Reform". The texts in this collection are organized into three large blocks. The first consists of texts that address "the construction of the field of knowledge of collective health": the health-disease process; the organization of health care; health and social determination; knowledge and knowledge. In the second block, the texts address "the construction of political strategy", grouped into three subsections: criticism of the Brazilian health system; paths and borders; and reflections on the democratic transition. The third block, "Theory and tactics of health reform", is composed of texts that discuss the "theorization of practice" related to the direction of health policy in the late 1980s[3(6)].

Academic studies on the Brazilian Health Reform invariably place the journal as one of the main vehicles for the dissemination of the health thinking of the time, which was born and developed in the collective health departments of public universities, in specialization courses in public health, and in the services that received the graduates of these courses[4,5]. Thus, the ideals of the Health Reform spread in the academic environment, in health services, and in social movements that emerged on the outskirts of cities, demanding better housing conditions, education, and access to health services. The journal is also an empirical source for theses and dissertations[6,7].

The first Editorial Board included: Emerson Elias Merhy, Ana Maria Segall Corrêa, Dalmo Herrera Feitoza, David Capistrano Filho, Sandra Roncali Mafezolli and Aguinaldo Gonçalves. Over time, many sanitarians took over the journal's editorship, expanding and/or renewing the editorial staff. It is important to highlight Paulo Duarte de Carvalho Amarante's participation as editor of the journal in the periods 1982-1984, 1987-2001, and 2005-2013. At the end of 2013, Maria Lucia Frizon Rizzotto took over the editorship, which, in 2026, began to be shared between Ana Maria Costa, Lenaura Vasconcellos, and Maria Lucia Frizon Rizzotto.

The last Qualis-Capes evaluation classified the journal as A2 in the field of public health and, in the Google Scholar ranking, it is among the first national scientific journals in the field of health. In addition, it is indexed in databases such as Biblat, LILACS, SciELO Brasil, SciELO Public Health, Latindex and Summaries, with recent submissions to Scopus and the Web of Science. However, this excellence coexists, not without tension, with the material reality of a country that does not ensure financial sustainability for scientific journals that do not condone the commodification of knowledge. The absence of public policies to support national journals forced the journal, as of 2021, to charge a publication fee, a pragmatic adjustment imposed by the absence of the State – the same State that article 196 of the Constitution requires to guarantee social rights, but which continues to treat the funding of national science as a marginal item in the budget[8].

Over these 50 years, the journal has published 150 regular issues and 45 special issues, the latter conceived through an open call precisely to give voice to regions and social segments historically marginalized from the major circuits of academic dissemination – an editorial choice that is also a political position. The 2025 data show the scope of the work: of the 1,147 manuscripts received, 179 (15.6%) were approved and published, with an average of 160 days from submission to publication. In 2026, the volume of submissions remained high, with 1,116 manuscripts received so far, which is equivalent to an average of 140 per month. In August 2026, the journal recorded 86,488 visits in the SciELO database and 61,511 on the SciELO database website, numbers that confirm its continued centrality in the national health debate. The editorial 'CEBES on the agenda for the deprivatization of health and SUS', published in the last issue of the journal, registered 613 downloads in less than 20 days.

The authorship profile is also worth mentioning: 66.6% of the authors are women, 32.6% men, 0.5% non-binary, and 0.3% did not inform their gender; as for race and ethnicity, 62% declared themselves white, 16% black, 9% Latino or Hispanic, and 12% did not inform – data that expose, even today, how much the Brazilian scientific field reproduces inequalities that the tradition of collective health itself proposes to combat, and that should guide the journal's editorial commitment to equity in the coming years. The authors' origins include, among the top ten: Brazil, United States of America, Portugal, Argentina, China, Spain, Türkiye, Colombia, France, and India9.

Although organically linked to CEBES, the journal does not impose restrictions on authors' institutional affiliation; even so, it continues to fulfill its founding function of disseminating knowledge aimed at transforming the field of health. It is through its editorials – formally authored individually, as required by SciELO, but collectively deliberated by the executive board of CEBES – that the entity continues to take a position on the strategic issues of the conjuncture. Furthermore, it is significant – and consistent with its history – that the journal refuses to negotiate with the requirements of indexing databases the reduction of the publication of opinion articles and experience reports that point out ways to consolidate the right to health.

Celebrating 50 years of 'Saúde em Debate' is not, therefore, an exercise in academic nostalgia. It is to reaffirm that the journal was born as a weapon of a determined political field – the health movement that faced the dictatorship, won in the Constituent Assembly and continues, half a century later, having to dispute, inch by inch, the survival of the SUS against defunding, privatization and denialism. From the denunciation of the privatization of INAMPS in 1976 to the agenda of deprivatization of the SUS in 2026, the journal has traveled a circle that is not

one of repetition, but of historical continuity: the same cause, under new masks of capital in health. As long as some treat health as a commodity, 'Saúde em Debate' will have, in the next 50 years, the same reason for existing as it did in the first.

## Authorship contributions

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