

## Health education agents for the people: rebuilding participation in health

In Health, the struggles and resistance of the people are long standing, and their main achievement is the establishment of the Unified Health System (SUS) as a social, public, and universal right. Over the years, participation of the people has gained institutional notoriety with the National Policy for Education of the People in Health, fostering the political praxis in the SUS.

Faced with the Brazilian socio-political context established by the coup that ousted former president Dilma Rousseff in 2016, and the ineffectiveness of a denialist, anti-science and fake news-promoting State, the paths to building a participatory SUS have been called into question. Nevertheless, the strategies implemented by the State in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have had scant dialog with the movements of the people.

These scenarios, which converged with the high COVID-19 mortality rates in Brazil, the country's return to the hunger map, increased violence, unemployment, job flexibilization and precariousness, and the expansion of the anti-vaccine contingent, led organized civil society to create survival alternatives. Of particular note is the experience of health agents of the people led by the *Mãos Solidárias & Periferia Viva* campaign, an initiative of social, union, student, rural and urban movements, which created a network of solidarity practices and values in the face of the COVID-19 context, responding to the needs of the Brazilian people to combat the necropolitics that was taking hold.

With the return of progressive forces to the federal government in 2023, a new milestone in Brazilian history has been reached, with the reorientation of the state towards a socially equitable development project. President Lula's appearance on the Planalto Palace steps with representatives of the people, indigenous people, people with disabilities, black women and children – as well as the President himself being a former factory worker – heralded in the era of reconstruction of social policies with the participation of the people.

The Federal Government's new health management is striving to strengthen the SUS in conjunction with the acknowledgement of movements of the people, which have proved essential to the lives and health of Brazilians in recent years. The emphasis is on the democratization of the State and of health, and the Ministry of Health has begun to foster the participation of the people valuing their experiences, clearly manifested during the *VII Marcha das Margaridas* (Daisies' March) in 2023, with the subsequent publication of the Ordinance of the Training Health Education Agents for the People Program (AgPopSUS) within the scope of the Secretariat for Work Management and Health Education (SGTES).

The year 2024 begins by leaving a legacy in the field of health, because together with representatives of more than 40 movements of the people, the federal government will launch AgPopSUS nationwide, with the prospect of training 50,000 health education agents for the people by 2027, through SGTES and in partnership with the Primary Health Care Secretariat (SAPS). The major prospect is that the hope of balancing the progressive forces in Brazil will broaden dialogue and organization of the people, not only to prevent the despicable ultraliberal past from returning to the political arena of the SUS, but also to foster a government of the people “where the right to health is a consequence of improving the living conditions of the people”<sup>1</sup> will always be sustained in all corners of this country.

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## References

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