



## **TRADE AGREEMENTS AND HEALTH POLICY**

### ***The Public Health Association of Australia notes:***

1. Trade Agreements are bi- and multi- lateral agreements that regulate international trade in goods, services and intellectual property. Examples include: GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), TRIPS (Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) and the Australia – US Free Trade Agreement.
2. Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are a feature of economic globalisation. Globalisation is ambiguous in its effects on health and well-being, and may offer benefits as well as adverse effects.
3. Progress toward ‘free’ trade has been very uneven with the developed countries maintaining high levels of protection with respect to agriculture while pressing developing countries to remove barriers to the import of manufactured goods. This has serious implications for the health and development of developing countries including small farmers’ livelihoods (jeopardised by agricultural protection and dumping) and industrial development (jeopardised by inflow of cheap manufactured products). The experience of the ‘Asian tigers’ (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore) suggests that industrialisation can be facilitated by protection and that blanket liberalisation is not necessarily beneficial for all.

### ***The Public Health Association of Australia believes:***

4. Unregulated market forces are unable to guarantee equity with respect to services (quality and access) and prevention (in particular addressing the social determinants of health).
5. Privatisation and deregulation promoted as part of neoliberal economic policies and locked in by trade agreements contribute to increasing social and economic inequity, which adversely influences population health and well-being.
6. Trade agreements have potential to limit or override a nation’s ability to foster and maintain systems and infrastructure that contribute to the health and well-being of its citizens by detracting from a nation’s ability to legislate and regulate on such matters as:

- Water and sanitation;
  - Control of tobacco, alcohol and firearms;
  - Pricing of medications (e.g. price regulation in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme);
  - Practitioner registration standards;
  - Privacy rules;
  - Distribution of services based on need; and
  - Occupational Health and Safety standards.
7. Moving towards a fairer regime of trade regulation which addresses sustainability issues as well as economic development and which prioritises equity within and between countries is a necessary condition for global population health improvement.

***The Public Health Association of Australia resolves that the Board of PHAA and the Political Economy of Health Special Interest Group will:***

8. Continue to advocate to the Commonwealth government and particularly the Departments of Health and Ageing and Foreign Affairs and Trade to have all services that relate to or are likely to have influence on the provision of public health, health care and welfare services specifically excluded from the General Agreement on Trade in Services.
9. Advocate to the Commonwealth government for Australia to support moves within the World Health Organisation (WHO) to provide advice to national governments regarding the implications of trade agreements for health.
10. Advocate to the Commonwealth government for Australia to support moves within the WHO to reform global and national intellectual property protection rules to facilitate the development of pharmaceuticals for diseases of the developing world and to facilitate access to essential medicines.
11. Work with the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network and with the People's Health Movement and other similar international organisations towards limiting adverse impacts of trade agreements on health and well-being.
12. Actively support and work with the World Federation of Public Health Associations to ensure that WHO promotes and protects public health within international free trade agreements.
13. Work with other health and welfare organisations in Australia to promote and protect the ability of Australia to develop and maintain the health of all Australians.

***References:***

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