Health experts call for TPP11 to have independent impact assessment

The TPP11 trade agreement, signed today in Santiago by Australia and ten other countries, presents ongoing risks to health despite the suspension of a small number of provisions from the original Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), according to the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA).

PHAA’s concerns centre on the affordability of medicines, the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanism, and the TPP’s rules for alcohol labelling.

“The TPP included a set of rules that would have benefitted the US pharmaceutical industry but delayed the availability of cheaper generic drugs and reduced access to medicines in the Asia-Pacific region” said Dr Deborah Gleeson, spokesperson for the Association.

“Several of these rules have been suspended now that the United States has withdrawn from the agreement. These include the TPP’s rules for biologic medicines, which could delay access to cheaper versions of expensive cancer and immunotherapy treatments and raise the cost of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.”

“But while these provisions have been suspended, they haven’t been removed,” Dr Gleeson explained. “They could be re-instated if the US re-joins the agreement at a later stage.”

“Access to medicines in developing countries could still be reduced by some of the TPP11’s remaining intellectual property rules,” said Dr Belinda Townsend, spokesperson for PHAA.

“The TPP 11 also retains the controversial ISDS mechanism that enables foreign corporations to sue governments over perceived breaches of the TPP11’s investment obligations” said Dr Townsend. “While there are generalised protections for regulatory measures, and specific measures to prevent tobacco companies from being able to challenge Australia’s tobacco control measures, public health policies in other important areas are not excluded from being challenged.

“The alcohol labelling rules in the TPP11 could frustrate efforts to introduce effective, mandatory health warnings on alcohol containers” said Dr Gleeson.

“An independent health and human rights impact assessment must be undertaken before binding treaty action is taken,” concluded CEO of the PHAA, Michael Moore.

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