



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Media Release

RACP calls for greater transparency ahead of Trans-Pacific trade talks

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The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) is calling for greater transparency from the Australian and New Zealand governments ahead of this week's Trans-Pacific Partnership talks in Hawaii.

RACP President Laureate Professor Nicholas Talley said the lack of transparency around the details of the negotiations make it impossible to independently assess the implications of this agreement on public health.

"This trade agreement has the potential to make or break our public health system so it's critical the medical profession and other appropriate groups are consulted during these progressive negotiations," Professor Talley said.

"While the Australian government has made assurances it won't compromise on public health, we have no proof that this is the case," he said.

"At the very least we are calling for an Independent Health Impact Assessment of the TPPA prior to completion of negotiations, and prior to acceptance and ratification."

The call comes ahead of next week's meeting in Hawaii, where governments from 12 countries will meet to discuss details of one of the world's biggest regional trade deals.

"Of particular concern is that we risk losing the safeguards for patients to access affordable medicines and this would be a disaster," Professor Talley said.

RACP key concerns with the TPPA negotiations:

- Without transparency in the negotiations, it is impossible to independently assess the broader implications for public health
- 'Data exclusivity' provisions could prevent drug regulatory agencies from registering a generic version of a drug for a certain number of years resulting in increased costs of medication
- 'Investor-state dispute settlement' has the potential to empower foreign companies to directly seek compensation from governments for policies that are in the best interests of society's health and well-being but which negatively affect companies' expected future profits
- The proposed rules on transparency and regulatory coherence could see industry (both locally and internationally) have a say in national nutrition policy making. This could work against the public health efforts to reduce the influence of vested interests in policy design and implementation.
- Chronic non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease could be impacted by the agreement, which may see industry have a greater influence on public policy in healthcare

- Without strong population-based prevention including clear labelling of health risks, limitations on risky advertising and price incentives to reduce risky consumption, the burden may further fall on the medical community to promote disease prevention.

“These provisions could interfere with local health policy relating to food and tobacco labelling, patent law, drug pricing rules, environmental protection – these could all be challenged in Australia and New Zealand, by foreign companies,” Professor Talley said.

“The governments of Australia and New Zealand must seize the opportunity to fight for the protection of public health in each country or risk compromising the healthcare of their citizens.

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