

**Senate Select Committee on the Free Trade Agreement between
Australia and the United States of America**

Public Hearing 5 May 2004

The Consumers' Health Forum of Australia (CHF) is the national peak organisation representing health consumer organisations throughout Australia across a wide range of health interests.

CHF has attended briefings, provided updates for members and met with the Department of Health and Ageing on consumer concerns about the Free Trade Agreement with the United States over the course of the negotiations.

The major concerns for CHF's member health consumer organisations have related to:

- sustaining the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) to retain affordable and timely access to medicines in the interest of health consumers
- improving transparency for health consumers in terms of process and evidence based decision making
- ensuring balanced information about medicines to support health consumers in making their choices in consultation with their health professionals
- protecting the interests of health consumers and the Australian public where industry development is considered.

Statements from Ministers and Departmental Briefings have confirmed protection of the PBS and gains in transparency and that direct to consumer advertising of medicines will not be allowed in Australia.

Health consumers are concerned to see that these statements are delivered and to have a say in how this is done. For example:

- Review mechanisms for applicants when a drug is rejected for listing by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) should be a public process.
- Industry hearings by the PBAC should not delay or add costs to listing of medicines for health consumers.
- An Intergovernmental Medicines Working Group should be informed by consultation with and input from health consumers.
- Committees considering potential implementation that involve government and industry representatives should also involve consumer representatives.

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