



Work together, health, trade officials told

By Online Editor

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Public health advocates need to engage in debates not against trade negotiators but in contributing to policy discourse, which will shape what the negotiators are aiming for.

A report called trade agreements and non-communicable diseases in the Pacific Islands said there was a need to mobilise advocacy for healthy trade.

Written by La Trobe University academics Dr David Legge and Dr Deborah Gleeson, and Pacific Research Centre for the Prevention of Obesity and NCDs Dr Wendy Snowdon, the report said it made sense for health policy officials to work closely with trade officials.

This, the report said, was to ensure that any flexibilities built into existing trade commitments were fully utilised.

“If there are ways of regulating access to alcohol and tobacco, which are fully consistent with existing commitments, it makes sense to explore these,” the report said.

“The health sector can also contribute to the design of healthy trade agreements by ensuring that health considerations are fully taken into account.

“This would involve enabling provisions to support regulations for public health and ensuring that adverse consequences associated with other chapters and provisions are avoided.”

The report said there was an important technical side to trade policy making but this was not the whole story.

“There is also a political dimension, which is about people with different interests and perspectives arguing for outcomes, which are beneficial to them,” it said.

“There are many powerful stakeholders who benefit from NCDs epidemic. They often have much at stake and can be very focused on getting the outcomes they want.

“In contrast, the people whose health are at stake constitute a much more diffuse collectively, relatively unorganised, unaware and inarticulate in comparison to the industry stakeholders,” it added.

Meanwhile, the Pasifika Medical Association's Claiming Healthy Futures conference, which ended on Saturday, was attended by about 200 delegates from 14 regional countries who took the opportunity to collaborate on a range of issues vital to improving Pacific health.

PMA president Doctor Kiki Maoate said they were there to see what difference they could make in medical intervention.

“Every contribution is important as everybody has a big contribution to make in health. This conference is to find out how we can give our people the best health care and find out what we are doing for them,” said Dr Maoate. The conference themes were based on cancer, maternal and child health.

Dr Maoate said these were issues that needed to be dealt with because of their growing urgency.

“Also Pacific health leaders are making critical decisions regarding health investments in a period of scarce resources whilst dealing with the growing demand and urgency of non-communicable diseases,” he said.

He added that malaria and HIV still remained key dominating health challenges for some Pacific countries.

“Our work will reflect on us, our institutions and our country.”

The conference was a collaboration between PMA, Fiji Medical Association and Fiji National University, College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences.

SOURCE: FIJI TIMES/PACNEWS