

Insights and evidence from The *Lancet* Series on commercial determinants of health (CDOH)

Key takeaways and actions for policy leaders and politicians

What should you know?

- The *Lancet* Series sets a bold vision for a world in which people are free from harms caused by commercial forces, and supported to live with dignity, in good health, and with a full sense of wellbeing; a world in which the health of people and the planet are higher priorities than profit.
- Commercial actors - ranging from small locally-owned businesses to major corporations and financial organisations - play an important role in today's world. Many provide people with fair access to goods and services essential to health and wellbeing, such as nutritious food, and quality housing, healthcare, medicine and vaccines. A growing number of commercial actors are adopting new business models and innovating to develop new products and practices that have positive benefits for the health and wellbeing of people, communities and the planet.
- However, some commercial actors' products and practices are responsible for escalating levels of preventable ill health, social and health inequity, and environmental damage.
- The climate crisis and non-communicable disease epidemic are key examples of this. Industries that produce just four harmful products – tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy food, and fossil fuels – cause a third of preventable deaths globally each year.
- In addition, the practices of a broader range of commercial organisations directly and indirectly harm human and planetary health and health equity in different ways. For example:
 - Encouraging people to consume harmful products.
 - Failing to provide fair pay and safe working conditions in their business and/or supply-chains.
 - Engaging in financial practices, such as tax avoidance, which limit governments' revenues for essential services such as healthcare and education.
 - Using intellectual property protections to block people's access to medicines or vaccines.
 - Shipping hazardous waste and products banned elsewhere to lower income countries, damaging people's health, biodiversity and environments.
- All too often, when commercial organisations engage in health harming practices, communities and governments pay the costs such as health care and environmental cleanup. This limits the resources governments and communities have available to hold commercial organisations to account.
- Meanwhile, where commercial organisations are not accountable for these costs, they make excess profits. They may then use their growing wealth and power to shape political and economic systems in their interests.
- This fosters a regulatory system through which commercial actors have little incentive to promote health and wellbeing.
- Increasingly, citizens expect their governments to protect the health of people and the planet and to hold commercial organisations to a higher standard. Around the world, governments are responding to this demand and creating systems that promote health, wellbeing, equity and sustainability. For example, governments are setting higher standards for unhealthy product marketing, composition and labelling, health levies and adopting wellbeing economy principles.

What can you do?

There are many opportunities for policy leaders and politicians to create systems and policies that prioritise health, wellbeing, equity and sustainability over profits.

Harness global public policy and build effective global governance for health:

- Call for and harness support from the World Health Organization (WHO) for national governments to take effective regulatory approaches across the full range of commercial sectors that influence health. This includes unhealthy food, alcohol, tobacco, mining, fossil fuels, gambling, automobile, pharmaceuticals, technology and social media industries.
- Join the support for an international convention on CDOH – to provide a strong international framework and foundation for multisectoral strategies, international collaboration, and comprehensive policy action on CDOH by governments.
- Help consolidate health considerations in existing global processes strengthening corporate accountability, for example in the implementation of the [UN Guiding Principles of Business and Human Rights](#); the [Treaty on Business and Human Rights](#); a [United Nations Tax Convention](#); or the [EU Draft Due Diligence Directive](#).

Adopt economic and fiscal policies that promote health and wellbeing, including:

- Wellbeing economy principles, frameworks and budgets that put people's wellbeing first, properly account for commercial impacts on health and the environment, and incentivise commercial practices that promote health, wellbeing and health equity.
- Trade and investment agreements that promote health, wellbeing, equity and sustainability, and can't be used by health-harming commercial organisations to advance their interests.

- Levies and policies that provide funds for preventive health and healthcare, discourage harmful product consumption, reduce wealth inequalities, and ensure commercial organisations are accountable for the full health, social and environmental costs of their activities.

Implement policy measures to address harmful commercial practices:

- Develop robust conflict of interest policies and rules for engagement with a range of different commercial organisations, including for-profit corporations, foundations, think tanks, industry associations, cooperatives, and others.
- Protect government policy from undue influence, including by improving transparency of lobbying and capping political donations.
- Increased public funding of science to reduce reliance on industry sources. Implement comprehensive laws and policy measures across a range of sectors to protect and improve health, including:
 - Higher standards for marketing of harmful products, including product labelling, health claims, social media and predatory marketing tactics.
 - Higher standards for commercial organisations and their supply chains to provide healthy and safe working conditions, and better pay and benefits for workers.
 - Effective policies to prevent harmful financial practices, such as tax avoidance, price fixing and monopolies.

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