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TITLE: The impact of neoliberalism on Australia's rollout of global non-communicable disease strategy nationally and health diplomacy role for the Asia-Pacific region

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Abstract

Background: Due to the epidemiological transition leading to more chronic diseases, a UN Resolution following a high level meeting on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), increased interest and investment in NCDs is expected, both within nations and in foreign policy. However, investment in this area may conflict with "higher priority" areas such as trade and security. This paper considers the relationship between health and foreign policy in the Australian context and Australia's role in health governance and diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region, with a focus on NCDs and trade negotiations.

Methods: Research included a policy review; interviews (n=18) with participants from international organisations and civil society actors working across health and trade at global and national levels (Switzerland, Australia and Malaysia); discussions with key informants (n=7); a review of activity on NCDs in the Asia-Pacific region; and observations at the 68th World Health Assembly and key side events.

Results: Australia played a key global health diplomacy role relating to tobacco control measures and has engaged in policy capacity building on trade and health issues in the Asia-Pacific region, however positions on food and alcohol measures taken in trade policy fora were inconsistent with commitments to global NCD strategy and had influenced the policy space of countries. There were increasingly neo-liberal approaches to NCD, trade and development strategies.

Conclusion: There is greater scope for capacity building and mobilisation on NCDs in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region and much to be learnt from the tobacco control area where there is greater policy coherence and capacity in terms of advocacy and resources, linked to the FCTC treaty. Public health advocacy on NCDs can benefit from engagement with various discourses and communities within and across trade, development and health.