

Opening the door to alcohol industry lobbying - what's wrong with the new WHO policy proposals

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WHO has published a draft proposal for a set *Framework and set of policies to address its engagement with Non State Actors (NSAs)*ⁱ. Member States are being invited to discuss these proposals at WHO's HQ in Geneva on 27th and 28th March. Public Interest NGOs are not invited.

WHO should have health as priority for all its actions. Eurocare supports International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) and fear that the new framework would compromise WHO's integrity, independence and its ability to fulfil its mandate. If the new proposals were to be adopted, the corporate influence would increase, despite the many statements of WHO's Director General, Margaret Chan, that WHO's policies, norms and standards setting processes should be protected from commercial influence. Last year Dr Margaret Chan has underlined that "the alcohol industry has no role in the formulation of alcohol policies, which must be protected from distortion by commercial or vested interests"ⁱⁱ.

In particular, the proposals introduce a new risky element, allowing Official Relations status, with all its related privileges, for International Business Associations. Up to now, if businesses wanted to attend governing body meetings in order to lobby Member States delegations, they could wear a public badge, or, if they wanted to speak, inveigle their way onto government delegations. Some, over the years have slipped through WHO's admission procedures, pretending to be NGOs. The new proposals open the door wide to participation by any business member of these Associations, except tobacco or arms companies. This would, in effect, legitimize businesses lobbying role at WHO's global policy-setting meetings - the very thing that WHO alleges that it is trying to avoid. In addition to turning WHO governing bodies meetings into multi-stakeholder public-private gatherings, the proposals would also allow businesses greater engagement at programme level, through agreed 3-year plans with WHO.

Mariann Skar, Secretary General in Eurocare, comments: *"We urge WHO not to adopt the policy proposals, since it is crucial that the industry is not regarded as a "partner in improving health". WHO have to support Member States in promoting better regulation and "best buy" policies; like regulating advertising, increase price of unhealthy products and limit availability"*.

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EUROCARE (The European Alcohol Policy Alliance) is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with around 55 member organisations across 24 European countries advocating the prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe. www.eurocare.org

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ⁱ http://www.who.int/about/who_reform/non-state-actors/en/

ⁱⁱ <http://www.bmj.com/content/346/bmj.f1889?tab=responses>