

Trade agreements must consider health

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Trade agreements which focus solely on economic outcomes miss the opportunity to address social and health goals. Credit: Take Steve, Flickr.

A leading health research expert at The Australian National University (ANU) has urged the federal Government to think more about the health implications of Australia's trade agreements.

Professor Sharon Friel, Co-Director of the ANU Centre for Research Excellence in the Social Determinants of Health Equity, said [trade](#)

agreements which focus solely on economic outcomes miss the opportunity to address social and health goals.

"We are currently looking at the nutrition effects of the Australia-US free trade agreement and it looks like the imports of ultra-processed foods, junk basically, have gone up. This is not good from a chronic disease perspective."

Negotiations have just concluded for a major trade agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), but are still underway for the Regional Cooperation Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Professor Friel is calling on the Government to undertake health impact assessments and ensure all agreements including RCEP include provisions that protect population health and [health equity](#).

"Health priorities can get lost in trade policy as the main goals are all economic, but it is possible to do it in a way that is also sensitive to health," she said.

"For example it appears that the Trade minister has stood firm in the TPP and refused to give in to US demands to extend monopolies on costly biologic medicines. This would have kept cheaper follow-on products off the market for longer, thus preventing access for many people to much needed medicines.

"With regards the TPP, it is still unclear whether the Australian government has agreed to an investor-state dispute settlement clause without water tight carve outs for health and the environment. If that is the case, foreign corporations will be able to sue Australian federal, state and territory and local governments in international tribunals over important domestic [health](#) and environmental policies," she said.

Provided by Australian National University

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