

Pharma companies paid over £1 million to UK parliamentary groups

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Sixteen of the 146 health-related All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) in the Houses of Parliament (UK) received over a £1 million in payments from 35 pharmaceutical companies between 2012-2018

according to a new study.

The researchers behind the analysis from the University of Bath's Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy suggest their findings reveal a worrying lack of transparency over payments received and potential conflicts of interests towards [public policy](#).

Through their research they extracted details from 6,624 entries about funding registered by APPGs, and found 1,177 payments from external donors, 168 of which were from [pharmaceutical companies](#). Two APPGs—the APPG for Health and the APPG for Cancer—received more than half of the total funding (£414,921 and £252,557 respectively) provided by pharmaceutical companies.

They also found that patient organizations, which had also received pharmaceutical industry funding, were frequently providing support for APPG's secretariat function (304 payments worth £986,055). The secretariat's role is at the heart of an APPG, responsible for its day-to-day running and activities and therefore holding significant influence.

Whilst the new study suggests there is no evidence of wrongdoing, the researchers argue that a lack of transparency highlights a much broader issue about funding and transparency over access to APPGs and policymaking more broadly.

Emily Rickard, lead researcher and a doctoral student at Bath's Department of Social & Policy Sciences, explains that "APPGs are a unique and valuable forum for exchange of opinion between parliamentarians and civil society.

"The focus of our research is on transparency and the democratic process. We have identified that APPGs receive money from various sources and it could be that this money is put to very good uses.

However, the impact of the money is unclear and the way in which it is reported is not transparent. This is important to address."

Supervisor, Dr. Piotr Ozieranski also from the Department of Social & Policy Sciences adds that "this research is important in the context of recent controversies relating to the transparency of lobbying, campaign and personal donations to politicians. Sometimes the perception of conflicts of interest is no less important than actual conflicts of interest."

Controversies about APPGs have long existed and a recent Parliamentary Inquiry was launched looking into the rules for and regulation of APPGs. Emily Rickard and Dr. Ozieranski submitted evidence to this with a focus on transparency issues identified via this research.

The researchers argue that there is now a need to reform [transparency](#) in the system and to create a more user-friendly interface so the public can access and assess information about funding. They also say that payments should be aggregated annually so that it is presented in the most straightforward way. This might include information to indicate which industry each donor represents.

Dr. Ozieranski adds that "currently if the total contribution from a given company is less than £1,500 in a year it does not need to be disclosed, but we suggest that all payments should be public. This is particularly important in the context of pharmaceutical industry [funding](#) and the decisions taken over future healthcare. We know that even small payments can influence decisions."

More information: Emily Rickard et al, A hidden web of policy influence: The pharmaceutical industry's engagement with UK's All-Party Parliamentary Groups, *PLOS ONE* (2021). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0252551](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0252551)

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