



Australian engagement: workshop recommendations

CONFERENCE DELEGATES participated in five thematic workshops with the aim of discussing and making practical recommendations for action. The themes and recommendations of these workshops were as follows:

Globalisation and health

- Encourage political advocacy for Australia's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (<www.development-goals.org/>) and recognition of the links between and inequities in health, security and economic development. This should occur at the highest political levels — the Prime Minister's Department, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (which could devote part of its website to these issues <www.dfat.gov.au/>), and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID <www.usaid.gov.au/>).
- Galvanise non-government organisations (NGOs) to advocate issues of health and economic development. Such NGOs could include the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, as well as others with little international involvement at present (eg, the National Heart Foundation and the Cancer Council) which could be encouraged to work in the Asia Pacific region.
- Urge the Confederation of Australian Industry and the Business Council of Australia to consider health and economic development issues in their overseas ventures.
- Subject all treaties, covenants and agreements ratified by the Australian Government and by private sector agencies to health impact assessments.
- Encourage the transfer of quality, relevant Australian health research (eg, on tobacco, injury prevention) to developing countries.
- Develop the small pool of international health expertise by providing more training opportunities in the Asia Pacific region and a career structure with Australian and multi-national organisations involved in international health.

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Emergence of global health strategies

- Regard global health strategies as an opportunity to begin to redress the inequitable distribution of global resources, which can threaten social and economic stability and the health of people in all countries.
- Use many different discussion forums (eg, World Health Organisation, national medical associations, learned colleges) to prepare policy options for implementing these strategies.
- Mobilise multiple constituencies (eg, citizens' groups, medical associations) to work with governments, organisations such as the UN, and international NGOs to influence

the development and implementation of their global health strategies.

- Strengthen the role of civil society (ie, non-government elements of society) to determine the goals, priorities, and resource distribution of such global organisations.

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Human security, conflict and health

- Invite the Australian Government to create a standing committee of relevant government departments and civil society representatives to consider global health issues in developing public policy (including foreign policy).
- Encourage the Australian Government to introduce the concept of human security into official foreign policy (as Japan, Canada and Norway have done).
- Form a coalition of academics and development practitioners to conduct a dialogue on health and development and to promote evidence-based policies.
- Develop a media strategy to improve public understanding of the issues and interests around global health.
- Build the study of global health and conflict into relevant undergraduate curricula and invite university schools of public health or health sciences to create opportunities for students to gain overseas experience by, for example, accrediting overseas units and placements, and facilitating internships with multilateral organisations, such as the World Health Organization and the World Bank.
- Undertake research and advocacy on conflict-related issues critical to public health, such as arms control.

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Development and humanitarian aid

Create a "Coalition for global health" to:

- engage in dialogue on future policy formulation within AusAID. (This could influence a health issues and trends paper presently being developed as the basis for a new AusAID health policy.)
- form a strategy group that meets quarterly and would drive the global health agenda forward.
- develop a public information strategy that is based on policy goals, addresses public opinion, uses multimedia channels of communication, and identifies advocating champions.

- develop a mechanism for supporting public discussion that also identifies funding opportunities and targets the next generation of health and other relevant professionals.
- conduct an annual symposium on global health that continually evaluates progress and identifies ways forward.

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Human rights and equity in health policy

Strengthen ethical and human rights awareness in Australia

Through evidence-based advocacy, strengthening of organisations and public discussion. This could include an Australian Bill of Rights enshrining social, cultural and economic rights,

so that

- society collectively thinks about and acts on these issues; and
- ethical considerations are taken into account in political and policy formulation processes.

Epilogue

THE GLOBAL HEALTH AND FOREIGN POLICY articles in this issue of the Journal leave us in no doubt that the answer to the question posed in the Symposium title is an emphatic “Yes”! There *is* a great deal of scope for Australian engagement.

Symposium participants outlined some practical steps to strengthen the links between health and foreign policy by:

- broadening the public policy agenda;
- engaging civil society more closely in the policy debate; and
- improving public understanding of global health issues.

What is needed to develop and advance this agenda? There was overwhelming support from Symposium participants for the creation of an Australian Coalition for Global Health (name yet to be determined). The broad purpose of such a Coalition would be to advocate for (i) considering health implications in developing Australian foreign policy and trade agreements, and (ii) reducing global health inequalities.

It was agreed during the Symposium that, to achieve this goal, a small coordination group should be formed, which would comprise participants from non-government organisations, academia, the private sector and interested individuals. Nominations have been sought for this coordination group, the purpose of which would be to advise on the creation of the Coalition and the organisational arrangements underpinning it, as well as to examine possible funding options, agree on an appropriate name, develop terms of reference, and formulate a work program. The coordination group will meet over the next few months, with a potential launching of the Coalition by mid 2004.

The strategic pathway the Coalition adopts to argue the case for increased importance of health in foreign policy will

Strengthen Australian awareness of the ethical and human rights aspects of global health

Through the development of such awareness in health, development and foreign policy professionals; support for the appointment of clinical ethicists in teaching hospitals; commitment to equity and diversity in health representation, employment and practice; and honouring Australia’s international human rights obligations,

so that

- equity in health is realised, both nationally and globally.

Seek to achieve an aspirational element to Australia’s foreign policy and international assistance

Through influencing political and policy development processes,

so that

- Australia acts to achieve the common good, globally as well as domestically.

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be critical. As articles in this issue highlight, there are many ways of viewing the prism.

One current strategy promotes national self-interest, with a particular focus on topical issues such as controlling the international spread of infectious diseases and bioterrorism. Such a strategy may resonate with governments; however, there is a risk that broader global health considerations would be constrained by this limited agenda.

Conversely, while a strong humanitarian and human rights-based approach might be more in tune with the beliefs of many of those advocating greater consideration of health in foreign policy, such arguments have not held much sway in the Australian political context in recent years.

A promising pathway is proposed by McInnes (*page 168*).¹ He argues that, in an environment in which national boundaries are of decreasing importance, “narrow conceptions of the national interest have become less relevant, and a more internationalist and communitarian perspective is required”. This strategy treads a fine line by arguing that Australia’s national interest is best served if our Asian and Pacific neighbours enjoy good health, robust economies, and good security.

What is evident is that, unless a strong, active and broad-based advocacy group is formed in Australia, the considerable enthusiasm and desire for action evident at the September 2003 Global Health and Foreign Policy Symposium will dissipate.

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1. McInnes CJ. Looking beyond the national interest: reconstructing the debate on health and foreign policy. *Med J Aust* 2004; 180: 168-170. □