Big Pharma Spends Over €40 Million per Year Lobbying in the EU, Dwarfing Public Health NGOs

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New research reveals that the pharmaceutical industry lobby is spending more than €40 million annually to influence decision making in the European Union (EU) – of which nearly half is spent by drug manufacturers on in-house lobbyists.

According to these findings, civil society organisations active on EU medicines issues, on the other hand, spend a combined €3.4 million per year. With the immense disparity between the affluence of public interest groups and the industrial lobby, it becomes even more difficult to level the policy playing field.

The report “Divide & Conquer: A look behind the scenes of the EU pharmaceutical industry lobby”, produced by Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) and Health Action International (HAI) Europe, surveyed the entries made by pharmaceutical companies and their representatives in the EU’s lobby Transparency Register to find out how much the industry claimed to spend on lobbying.(1)

Results from this study show that many pharmaceutical companies lobbying the European Commission on legislation fail to declare their activities to the Register. As registration to the Transparency Register is voluntary, many pharmaceutical companies choose not to declare their expenditures. If recorded properly, expenditure on lobbying activities by the industry could be shown to be as high as €91 million annually, which would be more comparable with the lobby spending declared in the United States (2).The report estimates that 220 lobbyists are active in the EU on behalf of the pharmaceutical industry.(3)

The pharmaceutical industry lobby has been linked to the EU’s move to enhance data protection which is resulting in delays to marketing cheaper generic medicines.(4) The industry lobby has also been implicated in EU member states’ response to the so-called H1N1 Influenza, specifically through alleged mass-spending on insufficiently tested vaccines, posing unknown safety risks to those vaccinated.(5)

HAI Europe Project officer Katrina Perehudoff said “The pharmaceuticals industry has a significant presence in Brussels, and is clearly spending considerable sums of money on lobbying. This information should be available so that decision makers have a clear idea of the level of industry activity – but at the moment we only have a partial picture.”

Olivier Hoedeman from Corporate Europe Observatory added “There is an urgent need to strengthen the EU’s lobby transparency register and make it mandatory for lobbies to sign up and ensure that the information disclosed is reliable.”

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Health Action International (HAI) is an independent, European network working to increase access to essential medicines and improve their rational use through research excellence and evidence-based advocacy. www.haieurope.org Contact Katrina@haieurope.org

Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) is a research and campaign group working to expose and challenge the privileged access and influence enjoyed by corporations and their lobby groups in EU policy making. www.corporateeurope.org Contact Olivier@corporateeurope.org

Notes:

1. The report Divide & Conquer: A look behind the scenes of the EU pharmaceutical industry lobby is available at http://haieurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/28-March-2012-Divide-Conquer-HAIEurope-CEO.pdf and http://www.corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/28%20March%202012%20Divide Conquer.pdf
Data presented in this report were retrieved from the EU Transparency Register between 15-31 January 2012, unless otherwise indicated.

2. In the USA the pharmaceutical manufacturing sector reportedly spent about €85,5 million ($115 million USD) on lobbying the American government in 2011. Clear and enforced reporting rules in the US yield a more accurate picture of pharma’s lobby contingent in America as compared to the EU. See: http://keionline.org/node/1321

3. The number of declared lobbyists in the EU compares with nearly 1500 industry lobbyists documented in the US in 2011. This figure includes all interest representatives from the sector (i.e. in-house representatives, lobbyists for industry associations and lobbyists from law firms or pr firms hired be clients) http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/indusclient_lobs.php?id=H04&year=2011

4. See: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20018988

5. See: http://www.wodarg.de/english/2948146.html.