



Health Action International (HAI) is an independent, global network, working to increase access to essential medicines and improve their rational use through research excellence and evidence-based advocacy.

HAI Europe Statement

The tide is turning against pharmaceutical ads

11 August 2009 - Controversy over direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription medicines is intensifying and nowhere more so than in the United States, one of only two countries where the practice is currently permitted. A number of recent news articles have underlined growing dissatisfaction with DTCA.

Industry cannot play a truly independent role in providing information to patients and consumers, and it is vital to maintain high standards of objectivity to protect the public from messages that aim to promote sales rather than inform health decisions. Health Action International (HAI) has consistently advocated for the highest quality of unbiased information about medicines. We strongly oppose any attempts to compromise this information and are, therefore, encouraged by this shift against the promotion and advertising of prescription medicines.

The New York Times recently ran a 'Room for Debate' discussion about prescription drug adverts, which revealed that the majority of responses wanted this type of advertising "altered or banned altogether" ([Saying 'No' to Drug Ads](#)).

The World Health Organization has also taken note of the increasing scrutiny of DTCA. An article in this month's WHO bulletin ([Direct-to-consumer advertising under fire](#)) set out some of the controversial advertising tactics and presented a number of views questioning the practice of DTCA from a range of stakeholders, including the CEO of a large pharmaceutical company.

In addition, another article noted that in July this year, the US Congress was debating four separate bills aimed at restricting or taxing DTCA ([Tale of a Drug Advertiser's Tall Tales](#)).

This trend also has global implications. In the past decade, repeated attempts have been made to erode or eliminate the regulations banning DTCA in Europe. The most recent, the 'information to patients' directive, launched as part of the pharmaceutical package, has proved to be unpopular as Member States have rightly recognised the public health and budgetary consequences of allowing DTCA through the back door.

HAI Europe will continue to monitor the progress of the 'information to patients' directive to make sure that the health of European patients and consumers is safeguarded by the ensuring that health decisions can be based on the most objective information and not the most effective advertising.

Teresa Alves, Coordinator, HAI Europe
teresa@haiweb.org

