

Insights and evidence from The *Lancet* Series on commercial determinants of health (CDOH)

Key takeaways and specific actions for public health practitioners,
civil society organisations (CSO), academics and health professionals

What should you know?

- The *Lancet* Series sets a bold vision for a world in which people are free from harms caused by commercial forces, and supported to live with dignity, in good health, and with a full sense of wellbeing; a world in which human and planetary health are higher priorities than profit.
- Commercial actors – ranging from small locally-owned businesses to major corporations and financial organisations – influence people’s health and wellbeing in varied and complex ways. Some play a positive role in society, providing fair access to goods and services necessary for health, such as nutritious food, and quality healthcare, medicine and housing.
- However, some commercial actors’ products and practices are responsible for escalating levels of preventable ill health, social and health inequity, and environmental damage.
- The climate crisis and non-communicable disease epidemic are key examples of this. Industries that produce just four harmful products– tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy food, and fossil fuels – cause a third of preventable deaths globally each year.
- In addition, it is not just harmful products that influence our health and wellbeing. The practices of a broader range of commercial actors directly and indirectly harm human and planetary health and health equity in different ways. For example:
 - Failing to provide fair pay and safe working conditions in their business and/or supply-chains.
 - Engaging in financial practices, such as tax avoidance, which limit governments’ revenues for essential services such as healthcare and education.
 - Using intellectual property protections to block people’s access to medicines or vaccines.
 - Shipping hazardous waste and products banned elsewhere to lower income countries, damaging people’s health, biodiversity and environments.
- All too often, when commercial actors engage in health harming practices, communities and governments pay the costs such as health care and environmental cleanup. These costs, in turn, reduce the resources and power governments and communities have to hold commercial actors to account.
- Meanwhile, where commercial actors are not accountable for these costs, they make excess profits. They may then use their growing wealth and power to shape political and economic systems in their interests.
- This fosters a regulatory system through which commercial actors have little incentive to promote health and wellbeing.

What needs to happen?

- Communities, individuals, civil society organisations (CSOs) and health professionals must continue working together to demand new systems, laws and policies that set higher standards for commercial actors, so that their products and practices contribute positively to our collective health and wellbeing, rather than undermine them.
- Actions needed by governments to change systems, laws and policies are set out in the [Key takeaways and actions for policy leaders and politicians](#). These include adopting economic and fiscal systems and policies that prioritise health and wellbeing and take action across the full range of industry sectors and commercial practices that have negative impacts on health, wellbeing, equity and sustainability. That is, not just alcohol, tobacco and unhealthy food industries but also others including fossil fuels, mining, gambling, automobile, pharmaceuticals, technology and social media.

What can you do?

There are many ways public health practitioners, CSOs, academics and health professionals can influence action on CDOH.

Speak up, loud and clear:

- Publicly support evidence-based health measures. Make a compelling case for action to governments and the community. Draw attention to and oppose the harmful influences, policies, practices and products of commercial actors.

Mobilise action:

- Build coalitions with a broad cross-section of partners. Develop consensus, evidence-based positions. Use focused, timely and persistent advocacy, and compelling issues framing. Leverage any splits on issues within industry.

Engage health professionals:

- Harness the legitimacy and authority of health professionals to emphasise the importance of prevention and influence action on CDOH.

Invest in and undertake research and build capacity on CDOH:

- Prioritise research that helps us understand the power, policies and practices of commercial actors, how to change systems, obstacles to action and importantly, enablers of action. Use research to expose the health-harming policies and practices of some commercial actors and industries and contrast this with those contributing positively to the health of people and the planet.
- Defend the use of science to support public health and oppose the efforts of commercial actors who seek to manipulate or distort science to advance their interests. Advocate for increased public spending on research to reduce reliance on industry funding.
- Make CDOH education and advocacy key components of health curricula.

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