



# International engagement objectives

We have 4 objectives that help us align domestic and international agendas and tackle global health challenges.

## 1. Protect the health of Australians

We have world-class expertise in health preparedness, response and regulation to protect the health of Australians and support regional development.

We take proactive approaches to regional health, including keeping track of diseases and providing vaccines to our residents. This helps us manage developing threats and respond quickly to emergencies like disease outbreaks.

We maintain our capacity in the following ways.

### Maintain rigorous surveillance and response mechanisms

Our strong surveillance and response mechanisms help protect populations against infectious diseases and health emergencies.

Outbreaks infectious diseases overseas can cause alarm. International outbreaks of novel pathogens – such as COVID-19, Ebola and Zika viruses – highlight the importance of working together on a global scale.

We work closely with domestic agencies, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. With these agencies, we participate in international collaborative efforts to control disease outbreaks, with strong focus on the Indo-Pacific region.

Our work with regional partners, especially developing nations, include:

- proactive efforts to contain disease threats, through surveillance frameworks and responses
- helping to provide medicines to our neighbour countries.

Increasing antimicrobial resistance warrants deep cross-border collaboration through these collaborative research and preparedness efforts.

We lead broader efforts to strengthen domestic, regional and global health security, working with the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations, including as part of the WHO's Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework.

We share our expertise with WHO's reviews and capacity building efforts, against the International Health Regulations and the WHO's emergency response capacities.

### Ensure therapeutic goods in Australia are safe

Our health products regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), ensures the safety, quality and efficacy of therapeutic goods available in Australia.

The TGA is a leading international regulator, working closely with the WHO and regulatory agencies in comparable health systems. These agencies share information on emerging issues, develop standards and coordinate regulation.

In addition, the TGA also:

- helps less-advanced regulators to develop their capacity to more efficiently deal with regional challenges
- cooperates with the WHO and advanced regulators to share information and assessments, to minimise duplication of effort and increase efficiency.

## Regulation

We contribute to regulating food, industrial chemicals, gene technology, radiation exposure and nuclear safety to protect the health of Australians.

In Australia, most of our therapeutic products and food supply come from overseas. We contribute to international efforts to keep these safe and of high quality.

We are well placed to do this, as we have world-class regulators working on health issues relating to food, industrial chemicals, gene technology and radiation protection and nuclear safety.

## 2. Keep Australia's health system at the forefront of international best practice

Pursuing best practice in all we do ensures we receive quality care, we are prepared for future contingencies, and our capable health workforce is empowered to do its best work.

Many of our future health challenges remain unforeseen or emerging. We continue to develop an expansive network, including governments, multilateral organisations, industry and academia.

We achieve this in the following ways.

### Include international best practice in policies and programs

International engagement informs our policy and program design and implementation. We encourage innovation and policy debate in health, health regulation, sport and aged care. This helps us improve the quality, efficiency and equity of our system, deliver better results.

### Benchmark health data to support health systems reform

We benchmark Australia's health system through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in particular its Health Committee.

This forum enables governments to compare and exchange policy experiences on various issues, identify effective practices and promote decisions and recommendations.

Australia played a leading role in the establishment of the OECD's Health Committee, which has worked since 2006 to foster financial sustainability and efficiency in health systems, and the provision of high-quality health care to all.

This committee works on:

- developing comparative analysis of health systems
- measuring health expenditure to support better policy-making
- benchmarking performance.

We also participate in annual meetings of the Commonwealth Fund. This is a private US foundation, which promotes high-performing health care systems that achieve better access, improved quality, and greater efficiency.

And we work with comparable high-income countries to exchange experiences about managing challenges and opportunities in our health systems.

### Identify and learn from innovation in health and sport

International research and development cooperation can help us further improve our health system. It gives us access to the best and latest research, through jointly funded facilities and infrastructure, enables us to share scarce research resources, and provides access to more data.

Working with peak international bodies, such as the World Anti-Doping Agency, also enable us to have best-practice sports integrity in dealing with issues like match-fixing and anti-doping.

## 3. Promote evidence-based international norms and standards to support robust health systems and better health in Australia and internationally

We maintain efficient, equitable, evidence-based approaches to health challenges, both in Australia and abroad.

We achieve this in the following ways.

### Advocate for international action to improve health outcomes

The health of Australians can't be assured in isolation to global events. In our interconnected world, working together to tackle common challenges is critical.

An important part of our efforts to promote global health outcomes while advancing Australia's national interest, includes working with the WHO and bilateral partners. We also work closely with DFAT to ensure our foreign and domestic policy efforts align.

Our domestic efforts are guided by international best practice, while our international positions are informed by domestic principles.

This includes protecting Australia's domestic interests, through tobacco control, food standards, illicit drug control, medicines regulation, sports integrity and others.

### Promote regulatory harmonisation to raise international standards, allow access to new products and technologies, and minimise regulatory burden

The department helps develop international standards by working closely with multilateral and foreign government regulators. These links include scientific, technical and legal elements of our work.

Internationally harmonised standards help reduce regulatory burden, increase consumer access to innovative products and services, and avoid technical barriers to trade.

Regulatory cooperation will prepare Australia for increased foreign investment and the impact of product shortages, while positioning us to offer and access reliable products in a growing international market.

## Advance Australia's good standing and capacity to influence internationally

Australia has one of the world's leading health systems, and is a respected and influential voice. We play an essential role in ensuring international norms and standards are evidence-based, and support effective and efficient health systems.

By contributing to technical and development work internationally, we ensure that agreements under international law do not constrain policy options, and support the development of robust health systems in developing countries.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, for example, has supported Australia's world-leading tobacco control reforms, including plain packaging. Without it, the battle to introduce plain packaging might have been much more challenging.

## 4. Contribute to Australia's foreign, development, trade and economic policy goals

Health not only affects all populations and economies, it also provides opportunities for closer cooperation and shared benefit.

Our international engagement is guided by our role as a responsible international citizen, and we support Australia's broader foreign policy goals.

We achieve this in the following ways.

### Align health care for Australians with Australia's foreign policy efforts

We build and reinforce international relationships, consistent with Australia's foreign policy goals, and work to advance Australia's national interests according to their comparative advantage.

We seek bilateral cooperation with priority partners and regional neighbours, and engage with counterparts in foreign health agencies, to address shared challenges, and support mutual capability development.

We also work closely with DFAT to ensure that our multilateral engagement is consistent with Australia's broader foreign policy.

### Provide leadership in our region to support development policy goals

We are well placed to help developing countries, who often seek out Australian expertise in building their health systems. We have experience in managing Australia's health system, and can mobilise expertise from all levels of government, the health professions, academia and non-profit organisations.

We work closely with DFAT to deliver development assistance programs, and ensure that relationships between national health ministries complement and reinforce those programs.

We also host delegations from countries seeking to learn about Australia's health system, and support the interests of developing countries, including through the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

## Protect health interests while supporting trade and economic policy

As an open, advanced economy reliant on foreign investment to support growth, Australia engages in free trade and investment negotiations globally. We do this through the World Trade Organization and through regional and bilateral trade and investment agreements.

As world markets become more interconnected, working with other countries in all policy domains, including health, is critical.

We have important interests in trade and investment agreements, not only because of our reliance on imported medical products, but also because these agreements can potentially constrain or conflict with important aspects of health policy.

We work closely with DFAT and Austrade to protect health interests, while supporting Australia's trade and investment agenda, including competitive positioning of clinical trials services and other health solutions.