

Australian health experts want clearer US trade deal

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Sixteen public health experts and seven health and consumer bodies are calling on the Australian prime minister, John Howard, and the opposition leader, Mark Latham, to make a bipartisan commitment to clarify ambiguities in the Australian/US free trade agreement. They say the ambiguities put Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), which decides what medicines the state should fund, at risk. There have been varying interpretations in the US and Australia of how the trade deal will affect the PBS. The experts say clarification is needed before the formal bilateral ratification of the FTA begins in late October. The organisations that signed the petition, a few weeks before the Australian federal elections on October 9th, are: the Australian Consumer Association, the Australian Council of Social Service, Public Health Association of Australia, Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW Inc, Women's Health NSW, Australian Women's Health Network and the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network.

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