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MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Public Interest Groups condemn drug industry call to use USFTA to lock out cheaper medicines**

“US drug companies’ claims that the USFTA gives them the right to take legal action to delay Australians’ access to cheaper generic medicines are unacceptable and confirm the fears of community groups about rising costs for medicines,” said Dr Patricia Ranald, Principal Policy Officer with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network of 90 community organisations (AFTINET).

The US Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (quoted today in the Australian Financial Review p.4) condemned the ALP amendments to the USFTA implementing legislation passed by the Australian Parliament, and expressed disappointment that the Australian government is not immediately seeking to repeal them. The amendments seek to prevent big drug companies from using legal tactics to delay access to cheaper generic medicines.

This follows the widely reported US government statement last week that it would not demand immediate repeal of the amendments but would lodge a dispute to challenge the ALP amendment after the USFTA is implemented next January.

“The US government will have the right to challenge the amendment, have the dispute heard under trade rules, and get a ruling against the amendment, backed up by trade sanctions,” explained Dr Ranald. “Such a ruling would be possible because the USFTA principles protect the patent rights of drug companies, not the rights of consumers. This undermines the Australian Parliament’s democratic right to decide medicines policy and will lead to higher prices for medicines.”

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