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MEDIA RELEASE

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HEALTH EXPERTS CHALLENGE PARTIES ON USFTA PBS RISK

Sixteen leading public health and medical experts and seven peak health and consumer organisations wrote to both the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition today. They called for bipartisan commitment for a unilateral interpretive declaration to ensure that ambiguities in the Australia US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that impact of the integrity of the PBS, are clarified prior to ratification of the deal in late October 2004.

The experts say 'significantly different interpretations of FTA commitments related to the PBS' exist between Australia and the US. These ambiguities could be used to force changes to the PBS in a trade dispute. An interpretative declaration clarifying these ambiguities is therefore needed to prevent the PBS being undermined by the FTA, they said.

The experts also called on both parties to ensure the PBS pricing system (responsible for the low medicines prices seen in Australia) is excluded from the reach of the joint FTA Medicines Working Group, to ensure that it would not be weakened during the ongoing process of implementing FTA commitments.

The letter is signed by the following organizations and Health Experts: Public Health Association of Australia, Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), Australian Consumer Association (ACA), Australian Women's Health Network, Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Ass of NSW Inc, Women's Health NSW, Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network

Emeritus Professor Frank Fenner; Emeritus Professor Bob Douglas; Dr. Ron Wells Former Deputy Director-General, Commonwealth Department of Health; Professor Paul Gatenby, Dean, Medical School, ANU; Professor David Henry, Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Newcastle; Professor Wayne Hall; Institute for Molecular Bioscience, University of Queensland; Professor Simon Chapman Professor of Public Health, University of Sydney; Dr Peter R Mansfield, Director, Healthy Skepticism; Pieta Laut, Executive Director, Public Health Ass of Australia; Dr Ken Harvey, School of Public Health, La Trobe University; Dr Angela Taft, Former Vice-President (policy), Public Health Ass of Australia.

A copy of the letter is at http://www.phaa.net.au/Media_Releases/OpenLetteronPBSandFTA.pdf

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