

The Right to Health

The right to health is embodied in various international human rights agreements and provides states with a clear and binding obligation to respect, protect and fulfill their people's health needs. This includes healthcare, but is also related to the underlying preconditions to health, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, food, housing, environment, occupational health and health-related information. While there is no legal obligation under international law for corporations to provide the right to health, the pharmaceutical industry plays an important role in efforts to improve health worldwide by developing safe and effective treatments. In addition, we recognize that developing countries are often handicapped in their efforts to fulfill their obligations by shortages of resources of all kinds. Indeed, poverty is the single biggest barrier to access to sustainable health care on a global basis. In response, industry engages in numerous voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives that reduce mortality and morbidity among poor people in the developing, as well as in the developed world.

Novartis Position

Novartis endorses the right to health. We believe that each sphere of society – from government and charitable organizations, to medical professionals and business – has a role to play in support of the right to health. The state has the primary responsibility to address the main causes of premature mortality and preventable morbidity. We recognize that in order for people to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, a division of responsibilities and a multi-stakeholder approach is necessary.

We believe the primary contribution of Novartis emanates from our normal business activities – discovering, developing and successfully marketing innovative products to cure disease, ease suffering and enhance the quality of life. Our commitment to research – targeting unmet medical needs – contributes to the advance of medicine, and thus social welfare and economic development. We recognize the role of generic drugs in providing society with lower cost medicines at the time when proper intellectual property rights have expired.

Through our generic drug division we are committed to providing the world high-quality, lower cost drugs. We strive to be a good neighbour in communities in which we operate – and within our sphere of influence we respect and comply with laws and regulations protecting healthy workplaces, the environment, and the safety of our products and services. Novartis adheres to a global standard in line with our corporate citizenship policies, regardless of potentially lower, local legal standards.

Novartis has established for employees in the developing world a comprehensive program of medical services. These services include: free or heavily subsidized facilities for diagnosis, treatment, and psychosocial care of workers with HIV/AIDS, or other poverty-related diseases such as tuberculosis (TB) or malaria.

Moreover, the success of our business enables Novartis to make significant contributions through charitable institutions such as the Novartis Institute for Tropical Diseases (NITD), the Singapore-based research center that is focusing initially on the “neglected” diseases tuberculosis and dengue fever that take a daunting toll in the developing world. All medicines discovered at NITD will be made available to patients in endemic countries on a non-profit basis. The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, active for more than 25 years, continues to make significant health-related contributions to needy people in the developing world. This includes the provision of treatment for leprosy, malaria and tuberculosis at no profit – or free of charge.

Novartis is willing to engage in “right to health” dialogues and we are willing to cooperate with relevant stakeholders in activities to the right to health.