

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS
CCLHO POSITION STATEMENT
Approved by the Board of Directors, April 1, 2004**

The U.S. has signed and is currently negotiating international trade agreements with significant implications for health care and public health (the General Agreement on Trade in Services or GATS which covers all 145 nations belonging to the World Trade Organization, and the Free Trade Area of the Americas or FTAA which covers the 34 nations of the western hemisphere except Cuba). This process is taking place with little public notice, and no participation by the health community. Trade representatives are negotiating the terms of these and other agreements that pose significant threats to public health, the environment, and providers and users of both public and private services. It is imperative that CCLHO affirms loudly the importance of placing public health priorities over trade and financial concerns. We note that under GATS and FTAA any local, state, or national laws and regulations that protect health can be superseded if they are interpreted by closed international trade tribunals as barriers to trade and as “unnecessary”. These rules could severely restrict the ability of federal, state, and local governments to regulate services such as: standards for licensing physicians, nurses, and dentists; standards for the performance of health insurance companies; rules regarding the distribution of alcohol, tobacco, and firearms; the ability of governments to determine the purposes for distributing public subsidies, including those for the care of underserved populations and graduate medical education; the licensing of hospitals and health facilities; standards for research and development; laws regarding privacy and confidentiality of medical information; standards for higher education; the safe administration of water and sanitation services; and other basic public health functions and environmental protections.

CCLHO strongly advocates that the General Agreement on Trade in Services, the Free Trade of the Americas, and similar international trade agreements recognize that medical care and public health concerns take priority over commercial interests, and that trade negotiations be conducted in a transparent manner and with full attention to medical and health concerns, and with full participation by the public health community. We must insist that any provision that could negatively affect health or health care, safe and sufficient water, and/or other vital human services be excluded from these agreements past and future. We urge our elected representatives, the United States Trade Representative, our President, and our allies around the world advocating for fair trade agreements to:

1. Assure that health takes priority over commercial interests.
2. Call for an assessment of the impact of GATS, FTAA, and similar agreements on population health and assure, based on such an assessment, that these agreements do not have an adverse impact on health.
3. Exclude vital human services such as health care, water, and intellectual property rules that affect affordable medications, provisions for safe working condition, and other basic public health functions and environmental protections from trade negotiations and challenge under these agreements.
4. Include public health representatives in the negotiating advisory process, and promote transparency and democratic accountability at all levels of trade negotiations.
5. Support enforceable commitments to advancing population health, and to achieving universal access to health care, affordable medications, and safe, affordable water in the U.S. and internationally.