

The Oxford Health Alliance guidelines for funding and interaction with industry and other sectors

Version 1, February 2008

Summary

The Oxford Health Alliance (OxHA) believes that industry needs to be part of the solution, not part of the problem, if effective, sustainable progress is to be made in confronting the global epidemic of chronic disease. To ensure transparent, conflict-free collaboration with all sectors, the following guidelines are published.

Introduction

The work of the Oxford Health Alliance is based on the belief that change across all sectors will be necessary to achieve sustainable and meaningful public health improvement. Efforts to address lifestyle-related chronic diseases by individual academic institutions, governments, NGOs and for-profit organisations, however intensive, will not be sufficient unless we find new ways to collaborate. Interaction between sectors such as the public health community and industry must be part of this picture.

Successful collaborative working must be based on trust among the diverse stakeholders who, to date, have had little history of sustained interaction. OxHA is committed to creating a neutral environment in which all who wish to contribute to public health goals can do so. Apart from the tobacco industry, OxHA aims to work with all industry sectors that can show that their goal is to promote the health of the public and who have already aligned, or are planning to align, with the agenda in a transparent way.

All interactions will be based on trust and transparency and based on the best evidence available. It is important to seek common ground where profitability and public health coincide and to challenge practices that place profits and public health in conflict. Market forces, used appropriately, can be a powerful means of advancing health and have a legitimate right to be included.

OxHA is also committed to transparent, ethical behaviour with respect to funding sources and interactions with the private sector.

This is not immediately accepted by all stakeholders. On the one hand, extensive alliances of scientists and academic institutions with the private sector have led to criticism and concern about conflicts of interest. One study found a significant relationship between consultants and authors who had a financial relationship with industry and subsequently expressed support for industry.* Strong critics of public/private alliances discourage any involvement of for-profit organisations in efforts to advance public health, assuming their motivation to be improved public relations, co-opting of opinion leaders in the scientific community, or lobbying to prevent legislative or regulatory efforts perceived to be unfriendly to business.

On the other hand, Kofi Annan in his UN Millennium Declaration articulated clearly the case for appropriate public/private collaboration in pursuing development goals.

OxHA favours working appropriately with industry as one of many ways to achieve objectives/goals – scientists can have a positive impact working from within industry, and more effective results in public health research and programmes are possible with industry collaboration, provided conflicts of interest are managed.

* J. Levine, J.D. Gussow, D. Hastings and A. Eccher, 'Authors' financial relationships with the food and beverage industry and their published positions on the fat substitute Olestra', *American Journal of Public Health* (2003) 93: 664–669.

Guidelines

The Oxford Health Alliance has developed the following principles and practices to maximise transparency, avoid conflicts of interest, and produce maximum effect. The objective is to protect the integrity of OxHA, while allowing for constructive interaction with different sectors and for creative connections to be made between parties that stand to influence public health.

The Oxford Health Alliance was set up in 2004 with an unrestricted grant from Novo Nordisk A/S.

All funding or collaboration decisions that have no potential conflicts with these guiding principles will be made by the OxHA Executive Director and reported to the Board. Where questions of potential or perceived conflicts arise, the Board of Trustees will make the final decision.

1. All those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects, commit themselves explicitly to the aim of improving public health across all sectors of their activity.
2. Scientific integrity must not be compromised by those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects: this includes but is not limited to selected protection of proprietary information and the freedom to publish.
3. Agreed joint actions are based on sound scientific evidence and principles.
4. Work undertaken with OxHA will not be exploited purely for public relations gains or for forwarding an agenda that is inconsistent with improving public health.
5. Those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects, will be alert for perceived or real conflicts of interest, and declare in good faith if any threat to these guiding principles is identified.
6. Those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects, will comply with all laws – including tax law, charity law and data protection.
7. Donations must be given in good faith and allow OxHA to retain intellectual integrity over its projects. The terms of any support must not conflict with or hinder OxHA's goals, plans and policies, and must not affect the independent governance and decision-making of OxHA.
8. Those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects, explicitly recognise the value of cross-sector working – industry, government, academia, non-governmental organisations, etc.
9. Those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects, recognise that children are particularly vulnerable, and must be protected by all stakeholders – parents, civil society, and the public and private sectors.
10. Those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects, strive to ensure that the human rights of those on whom they have an impact – employees, customers, local communities – are upheld, and in particular the right to the best available standard of health, and the right to information.
11. Those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects, are expected to provide inspiration and direction through demonstrating and sharing best practice, for example through the open-source 3FOUR50 website.
12. Those with whom OxHA works, or who fund OxHA projects, may use the OxHA name and logo only on projects undertaken in formal conjunction with OxHA. They may use the OxHA logo on their website(s) only with permission.