



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

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Suspend trade talks to prioritise public health

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has written to Federal Trade Minister, Simon Birmingham, calling for an immediate suspension of trade negotiations to allow developing nations to focus on the most effective public health response possible.

This comes after India, The Africa Group and 30 developing countries called for the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to halt trade talks to allow their governments to prioritise their health response.

Many of the WTO's existing intellectual property rules would prevent the ability of states to secure medical supplies to treat COVID-19, including potential vaccines and medicines that are currently being developed.

In the letter to Senator Birmingham, Assistant General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Judith Kiejda, has urged the Minister to consider the impact on developing countries, many of whom lack the institutional capacity and resources needed to fight the virus.

"Our government must support countries who do not have the capacity to continue trade talks at the height of a pandemic," Ms Kiejda said.

"While our situation may be improving, other countries deserve our support as they work their way through the unfolding crisis.

"This means working with the WTO to suspend intellectual property rules where they restrict access to key medicines and hinder the fight to save lives.

"Our union has joined over 300 trade experts and civil society organisations, calling on the WTO and its member states to suspend talks and put public health and saving lives first in all global policy development.

"The COVID-19 pandemic by definition is global and will continue for many years. Our citizens and community are only as safe as the weakest country's efforts.

"Our lives and our economy are in serious danger if we do not ensure that all countries are able to focus on eliminating the disease."

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