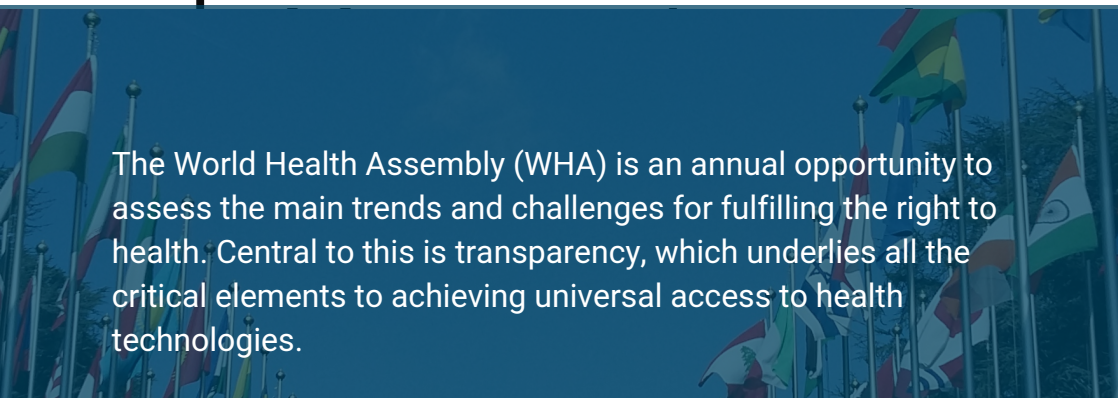





HEALTH IS NOT A GAME

Transparency is essential to ensure equitable access to medicines



The World Health Assembly (WHA) is an annual opportunity to assess the main trends and challenges for fulfilling the right to health. Central to this is transparency, which underlies all the critical elements to achieving universal access to health technologies.

Today, pharmaceutical companies are gaming the system. Now, more than ever, is the time to act: Governments must ensure and enforce transparency requirements.



WHO Member States must speak out and take action at the 76th WHA—and beyond. Topics up for discussion closely linked to the need for transparency include access to diagnostics, antimicrobial resistance, technology transfer, manufacturing and procurement of health goods.

Patents

The lack of available and accessible information regarding the patent status of specific health goods allows for the abuse and misuse of intellectual property protection mechanisms. Unjustified extension of market exclusivities and monopolies keep prices excessively high, hurts competition, and limits access to medicines and other health technologies.

R&D Costs

Pharmaceutical companies claim high costs of investment in research and development (R&D) to justify the high price of patented medicines. Yet, there is no transparency on the costs associated with their R&D. Despite repeated calls, including through WHO resolutions, for access to independently verifiable figures, industry remains opposed, and governments are reluctant to enforce and disclose relevant information.

Pandemic Response

Discussions and negotiations about pandemic preparedness and response are in full swing, in Geneva and elsewhere, after the catastrophic failure of equitable access during the Covid-19 Pandemic. While deliberations on the amendment of the International Health Regulations are mostly open to civil society and other stakeholders, the drafting of an international instrument through the International Negotiating Body is conducted behind closed doors with limited access for non-state actors and society at large.

Pricing

Excessive high prices of medicines strain health systems all over the world and significantly hinder access to health technologies for patients. The unique features of pharmaceutical markets allow for confidentiality to be used as leverage in procurement negotiations. It is high time for governments and international organisations to stand up and refuse to partake in a game of secrecy that only benefits the pharmaceutical industry.