

Tackling health equity: economic and commercial determinants of health

Health Determinants, Promotion and Prevention Department, WHO HQ

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**World Health
Organization**

- Introduction
- Commercial determinants as a social determinant of health
- Health and health equity impacts – the evidence
- Moving towards action



- **Background**
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The World Health Organization at a Glance



1 HQ Geneva

6 Regions around the world with

194 Member Countries

4 strategic Pillars of work

60 + Health Programs / Teams



- WHO European Region. HQ is in Copenhagen, Denmark
- 53 Member States, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans
- 30 Country Offices
- 4 strategic Pillars of Work + 60 Programs
- Country Cooperation Strategies and Biennial Collaborative Agreements (BCAs)



- 5 Thematic Centers of Excellence
- 1 Centre of Excellence in Venice, Italy
- 2 Health Policy Networks
- 3 Regional Initiatives led by VO
- 20+ Scientific Partners
- 53 Countries supported

Commission on Social Determinants of Health

The 2008 Commission on SDH set out **three overarching recommendations:**

1. Improve daily living conditions
2. Tackle the **inequitable distribution of power, money and resources**
3. Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action.

And set the aspiration to **close the gap in a generation**



World Report 2025 - Key findings on health inequities

- There has been **some progress** towards closing health gaps between countries, but **progress is stalling**.
- Health inequities are **widening between social groups within** many countries.



CDOH as a social determinant of health

1. Addressing economic inequality and investing in social infrastructure and universal public services.
2. Overcoming structural discrimination.
3. Managing the challenges and opportunities posed by the mega-trends of climate change and the digital transformation in a way that systematically promotes health equity.
4. Putting in place governance arrangements that will maximize the coherence and impact of action.



ACTION AREA 1

Address economic inequality and invest in universal public services



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Origin to WHO action: Rising in harm from commercial practices and particularly NCDs

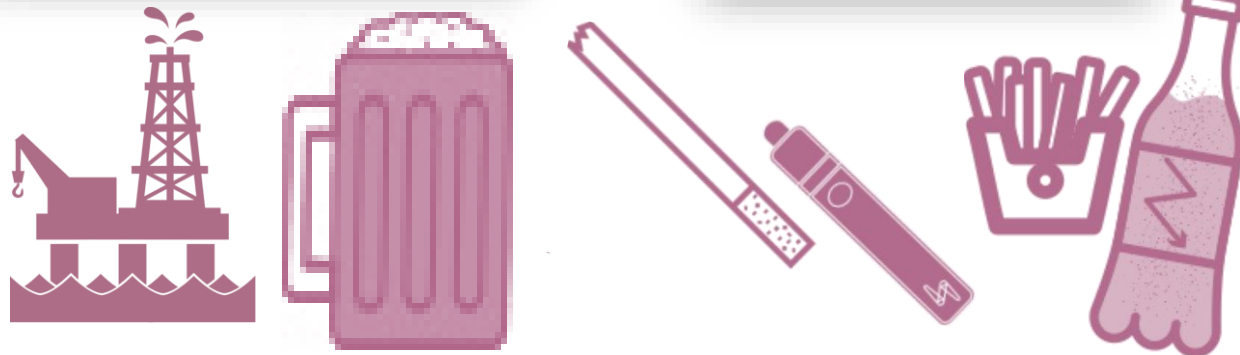


Table 1: Commercial Burden of Disease: estimating the global burden of deaths attributable to commercial sector products and practices

Risk factors ¹	Deaths caused by communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases		Deaths caused by non-communicable diseases*		Deaths caused by injury		All causes of death	
	Deaths	Percent of global total	Deaths	Percent of global total	Deaths	Percent of global total	Deaths	Percent of global total
COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS								
Air pollution	465,824	4.6%	4,040,369	9.6%			4,506,193	8.0%
Ambient ozone pollution								
Ambient particulate matter pollution								
Alcohol	292,427	2.9%	1,849,872	4.4%	299,675	7.0%	2,441,973	4.3%
Alcohol use								
Dietary risk			3,076,839	7.3%			3,076,839	5.4%
Diet high in processed meat								
Diet high in sodium								
Diet high in sugar-sweetened beverages								
Diet high in trans fatty acids								
Tobacco	629,134	6.2%	8,392,305	20.0%	31,840	0.7%	9,053,278	16.0%
Chewing tobacco								
Secondhand smoke								
Smoking								
Subtotal – commercial products	1,387,385	13.6%	17,359,385	41.3%	331,514	7.7%	19,078,285	33.7%
COMMERCIAL PRACTICES								
Occupational risk								
Occupational asthmagens								
Occupational carcinogens								
Occupational injuries								
Occupational particulate matter, gases, and fumes								
Subtotal – commercial practices			909,011	2.2%	311,491	7.3%	1,220,501	2.2%
Total – commercial products and practices	1,387,385	13.6%	18,268,396	43.5%	643,005	15.0%	20,298,786	35.9%
Global total deaths	10,193,395		42,034,124		4,299,441		56,526,960	

*NCD deaths include deaths from cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases, digestive diseases, neurological diseases, substance use disorders, diabetes and kidney diseases, skin and subcutaneous diseases, sense organ diseases, musculoskeletal diseases, mental disorders and “other” NCDs.

Source: Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network. Global Burden of Disease Study 2019 (GBD 2019) Results. Seattle, United States: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 2020. Available from <http://ghdx.healthdata.org/gbd-results-tool>

¹ For a full list of GBD data sources, see <http://ghdx.healthdata.org/about-ghdx/our-information-sources>

Gilmore AB, Fabbri A, Baum F, et al. Supplementary Annex. Defining and conceptualising the commercial determinants of health. Lancet 2023; published online March 23. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)00013-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00013-2).



Defining the Commercial Determinants

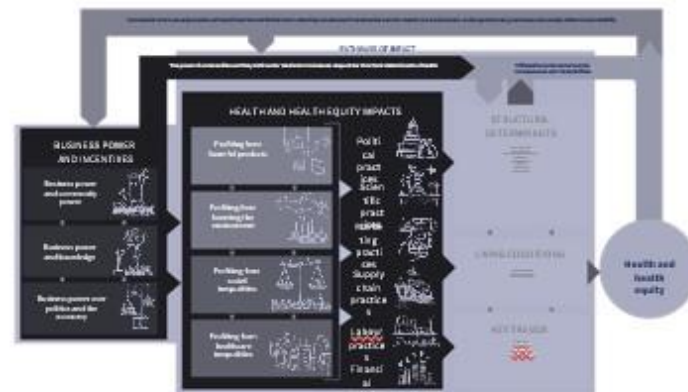
“The commercial determinants of health are those **conditions, actions and omissions that affect health.**

Commercial determinants arise in the context of the **provision of goods or services for payment and include commercial activities**, as well as the **environment in which commerce takes place.**

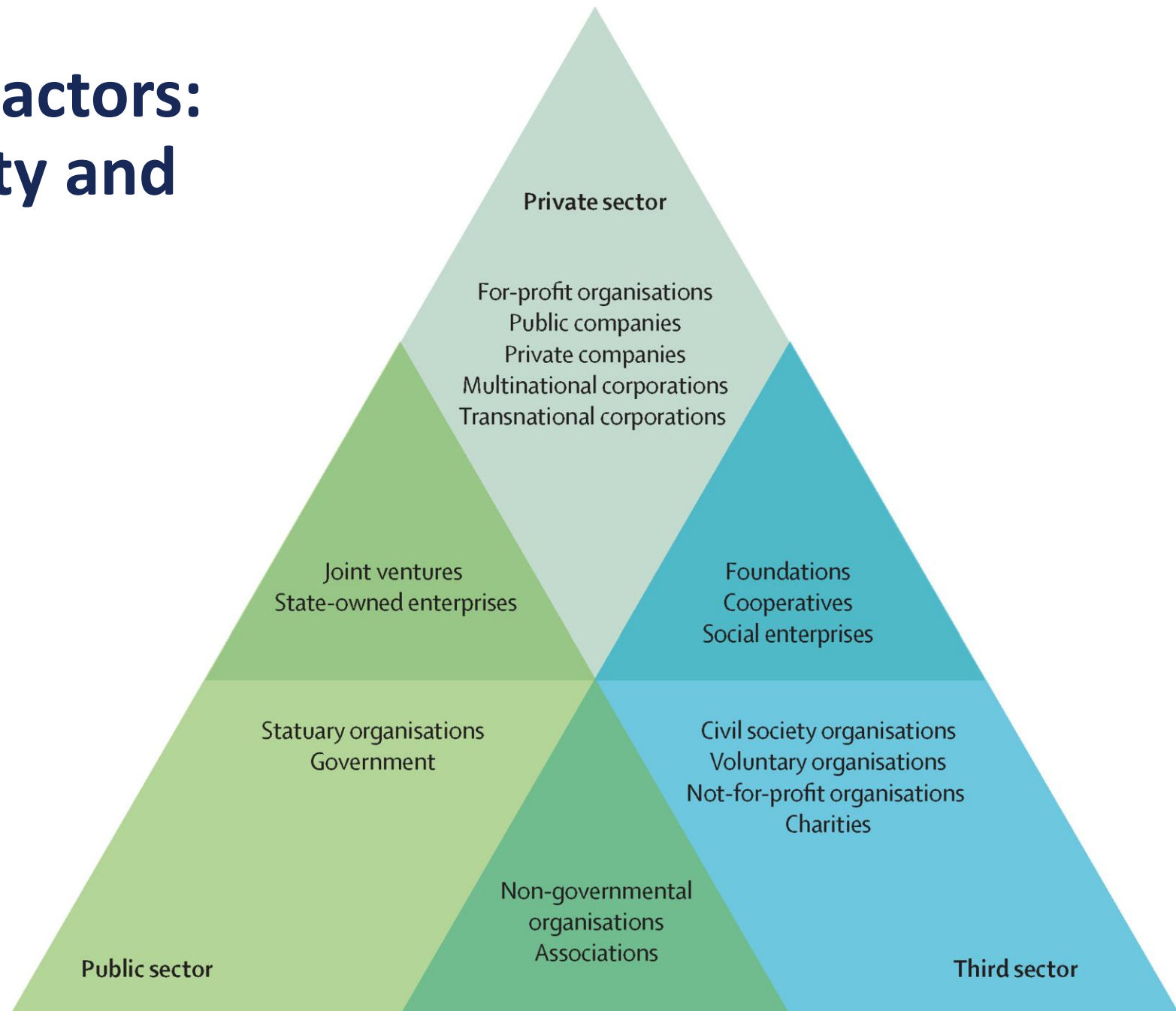
Commercial determinants can have **beneficial and/or detrimental** impacts on health.”

UN Secretary General's report on noncommunicable diseases to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) (A/72/662)

WHO Director General's report to the Executive Board (EB142/15)



Commercial actors: heterogeneity and complexity

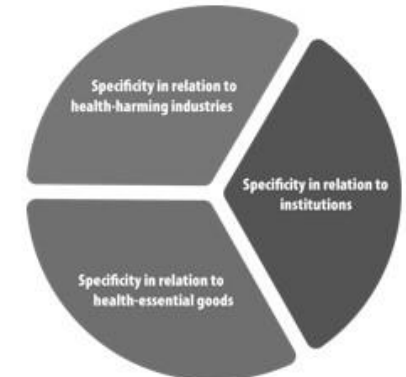


Lacy-Nichols J et al. Conceptualising commercial entities in public health: beyond unhealthy commodities and transnational corporations. Lancet 2023; published online March 23.
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)00012-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)00012-0/fulltext).



Analysing the commercial determinants

- There is an **increasing understanding of the impact** of commercial actors and commercial practices on health and health equity outcomes.
- A growing global **evidence base has established pathways for commercial impacts** on the health of people and communities.
- These pathways **apply to health-harming industries as well as other industries.**
- This creates a justification to explore the extent of both commercial actors and commercial **practices and influences as risks to health and health equity.**





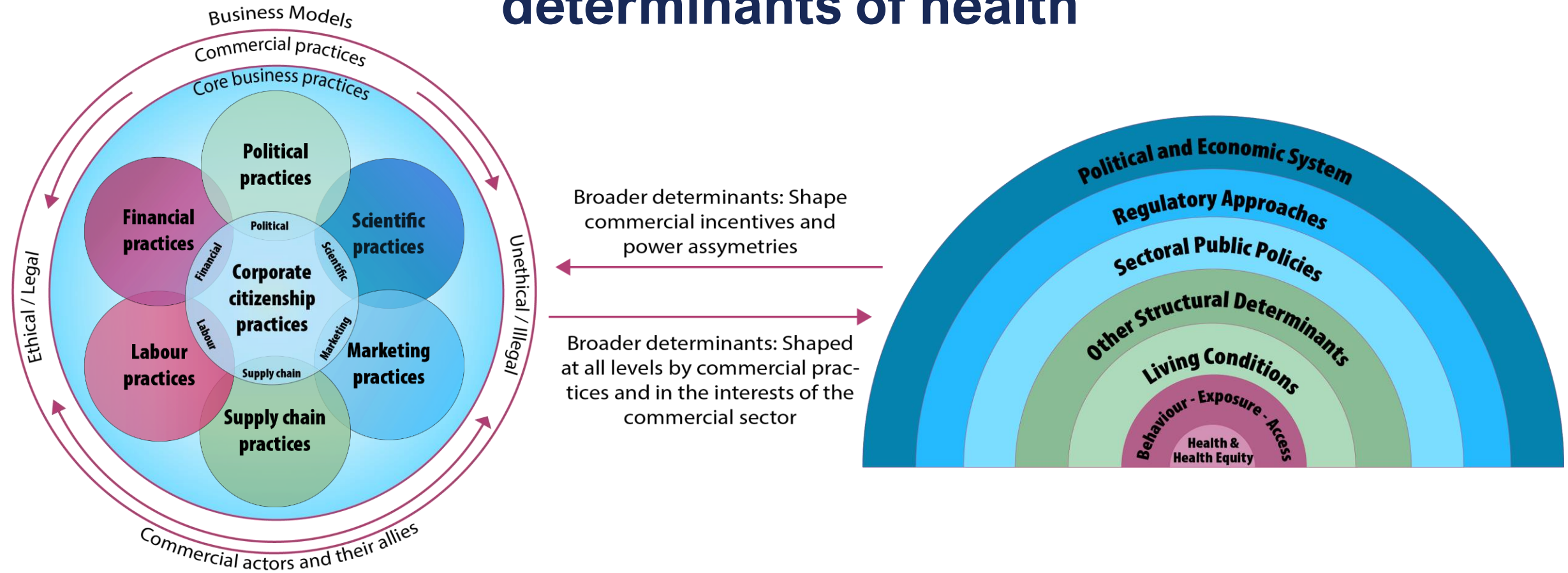
AIM: TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE COMMERCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH AND PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The **objectives** of the Report are to:

- A. **clarify concepts and terminology** on the CDoH
- B. **present the case for action** on the CDoH
- C. **synthesize the existing global evidence** on the public health and health equity impact of the CDoH
- D. support countries with **evidence-informed policy recommendations**

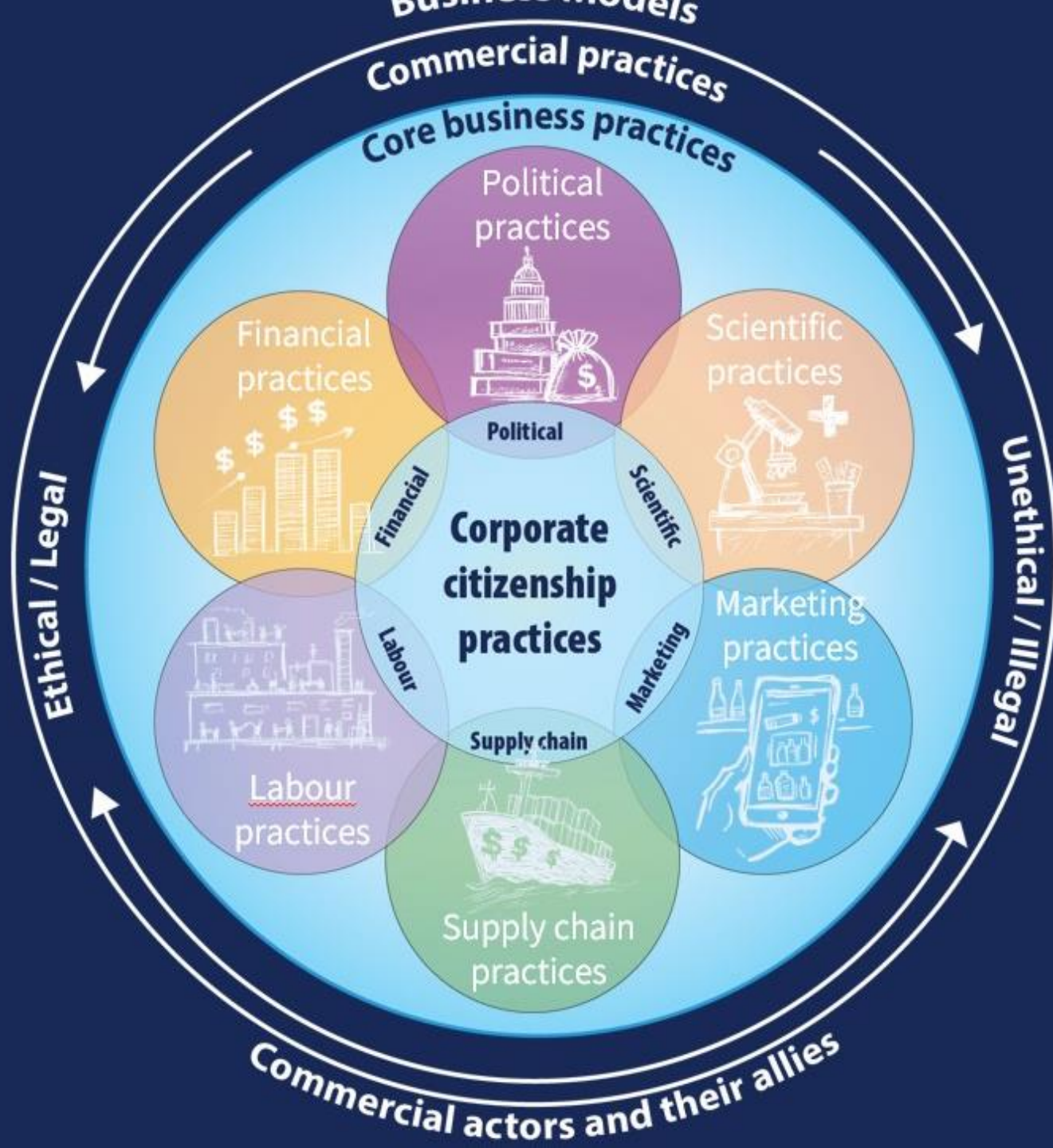


The commercial dimension of the social determinants of health



Adapted from Gilmore AB, Fabbri A, Baum F, et al. Defining and conceptualising the commercial determinants of health. Lancet 2023; published online March 23. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)00013-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00013-2).





Businesses rely on a **common set of commercial practices** – their impacts can be health-promoting, health-harming, or health-neutral



CORE BUSINESS PRACTICES



These are practices commercial actors engage in as **part of advancing their core profit generating business**

- products and services
- human resources
- waste management
- Efficiency
- other market actions



CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP PRACTICES

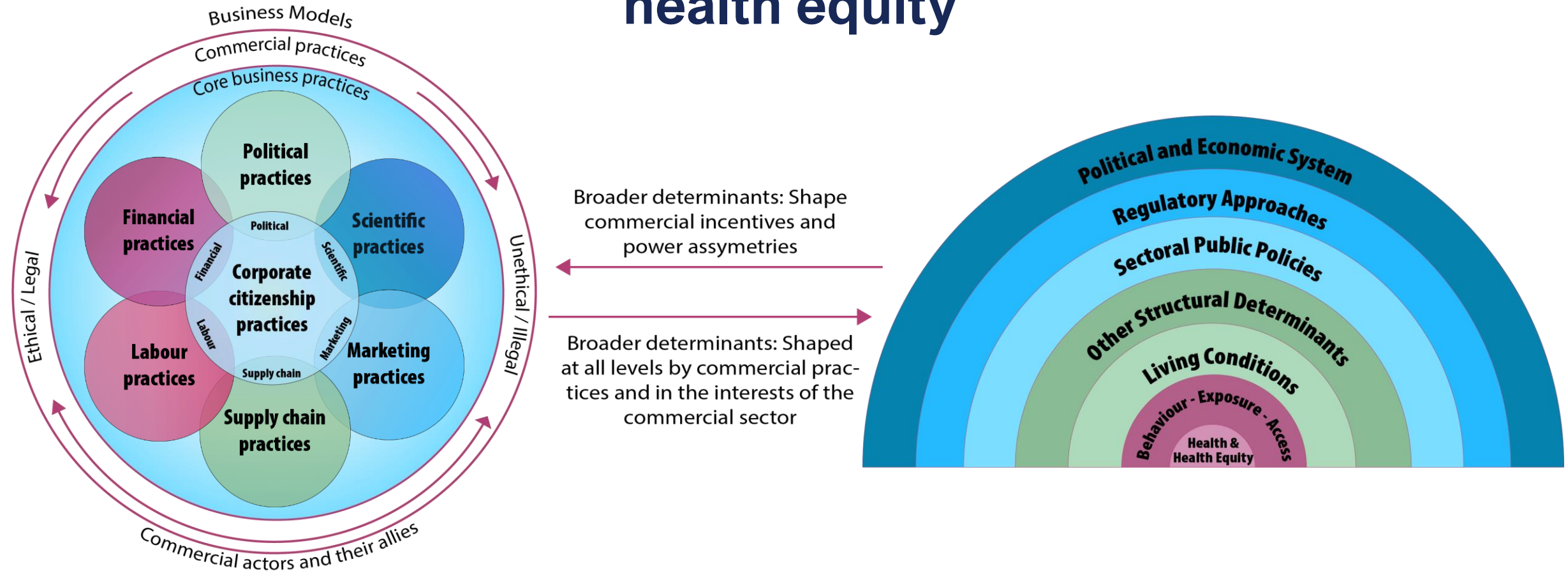


These are practices commercial actors engage in as **part of preserving and extending their ability to engage in core business practices**

- managing reputation
- minimising legal and tax liability
- gaining and defending subsidies



Impact pathways of commercial determinants on health equity



Adapted from Gilmore AB, Fabbri A, Baum F, et al. Defining and conceptualising the commercial determinants of health. *Lancet* 2023; published online March 23. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)00013-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00013-2).



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Profiting from harmful products



Tobacco, alcohol, health-harming food and beverages, breastmilk substitutes, gambling, firearms, pesticides

Profiting from harming the environment



Fossil fuels, chemicals, plastics, and mining and other resource extraction

Profiting from social inequalities



Employers, housing sector, transport sector, agriculture sector, water sector

Profiting from healthcare inequalities



Pharmaceuticals and health technologies, health and care services, wellness

Health-harming businesses, such as the tobacco and arms industries **have business models that are fundamentally irreconcilable with the public health interest** – evidence suggests the same applies for alcohol, health-harming foods and beverages, gambling.

The Evidence

Specificity in relation to health-harming industries



Health-essential businesses have business models centred on sectors essential for health (e.g., healthcare, health innovation, nutritious food, housing, water) and **pose special risks to health and health equity in the absence of alignment between their incentives and public health**

The Evidence



**Specificity in relation to
health-essential goods**



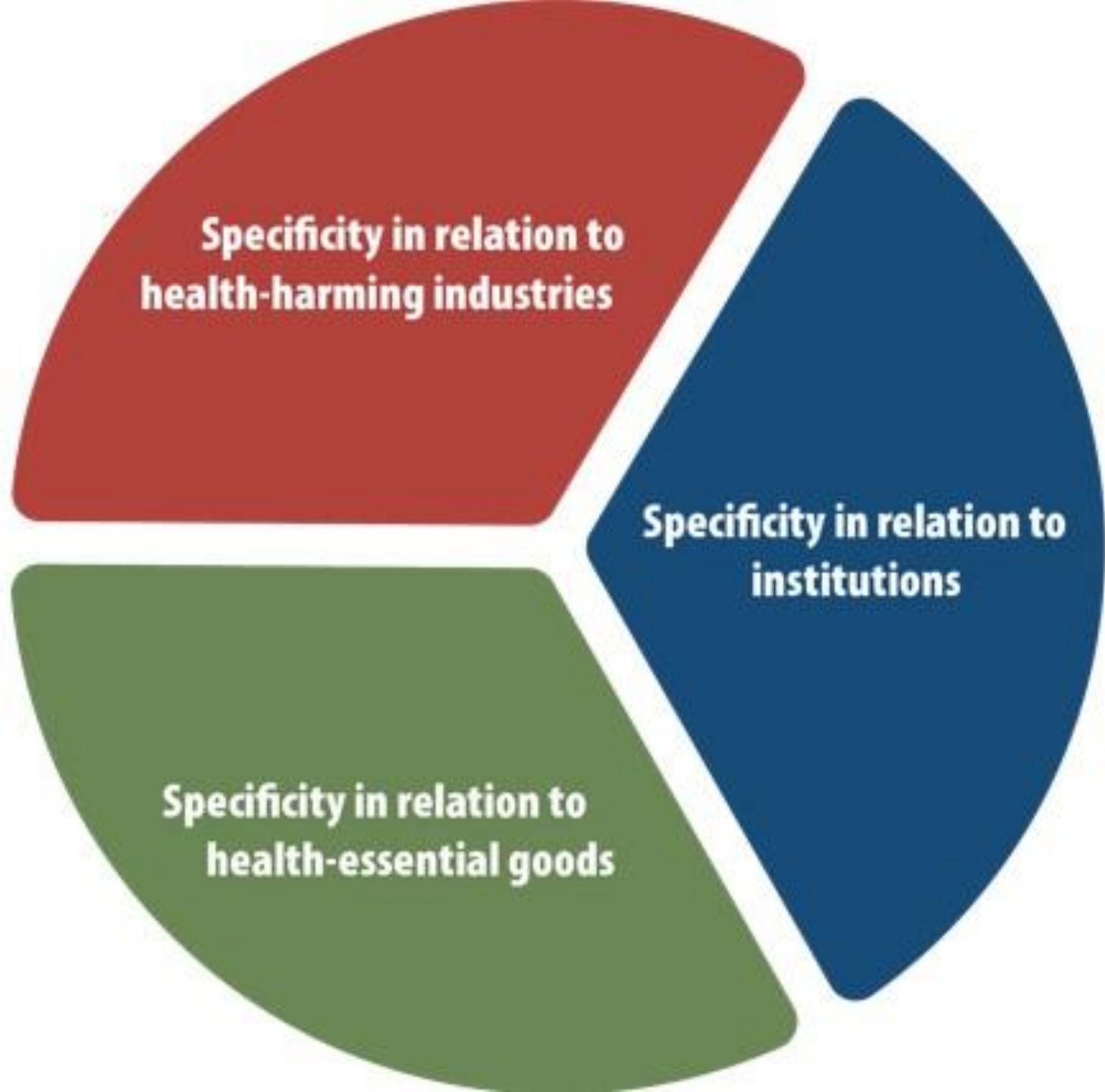


But governance for the commercial determinants of health needs to **cut across industries, public sector capacities, the business ecosystem, and broader determinants**

Specificity in relation to institutions

This means **there needs to be system reforms that encompass the whole commercial sector** to fully leverage commercial potential for health and health equity while addressing risks to health

The Evidence



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Wales – inspiring global action

- Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)
- Socio-economic Duty (2021)
- Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcohol (2020)
- HFSS Promotion Ban (2026)
- Smoke-free grounds and retailer register
- Free primary school meals for all
- Social Partnership & Public Procurement Act (2023)



Innovation and scaling solutions – global examples

- **Fiscal levers:** explore health levies / 'polluter-pays' fund
 - Local licensing frameworks in New South Wales and Victoria, Austria
- **Digital marketing:** responsible marketing code
 - South Australia Voluntary Marketing Code for Healthy Kids for public sector partnerships, procurements and sponsorship
 - Swedish municipal code
 - British Columbia, Canada
- **Healthy homes:** integrate health + climate retrofit policy
 - New Zealand
- **Fair work:** anchor-institution community wealth-building
 - Scotland Living Wage Cities
- **Data & metrics:** create CDOH Observatory & annual reporting
 - Brazil
- **Trade policy:** safeguard right-to-regulate for health
 - Health Impact Assessments



Concluding remarks

- **Minimize the harm to health** from commercial practices is central to improving health equity
- **No nation can do this alone** as these are structural international challenges that require strong partnerships for health equity, at all levels
- **Success will mean we make health the easiest choice for business...**
- **...therefore leverage the power** of business to be a partner for health and health equity





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Thank you

“WHO is committed to supporting national governments in developing, implementing, and enforcing policies that tackle the commercial determinants of health, not only tackling the harmful products but also the practices that undermine public health policies.”

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director General, WHO

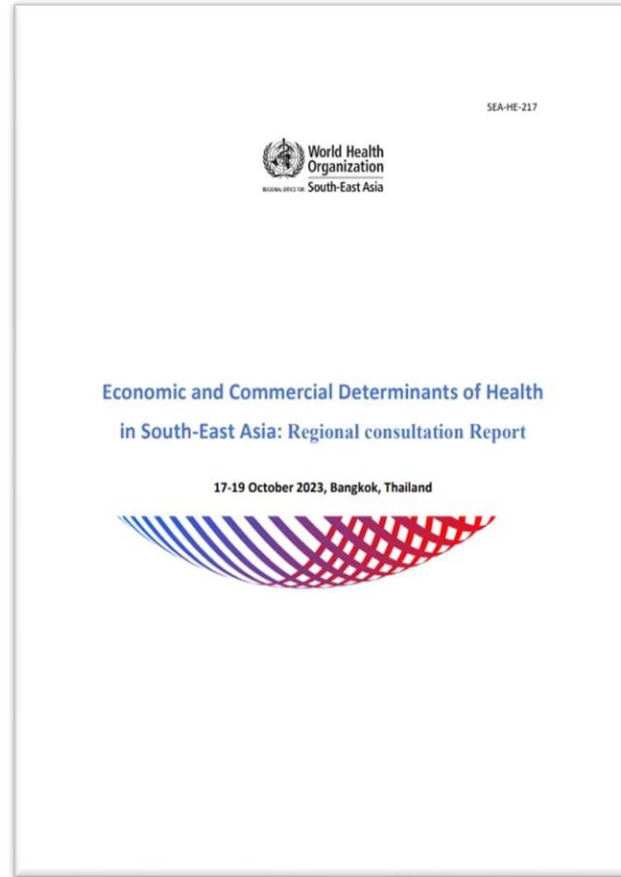


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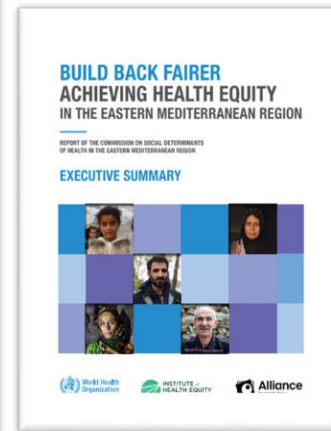
WHO Regional Approaches



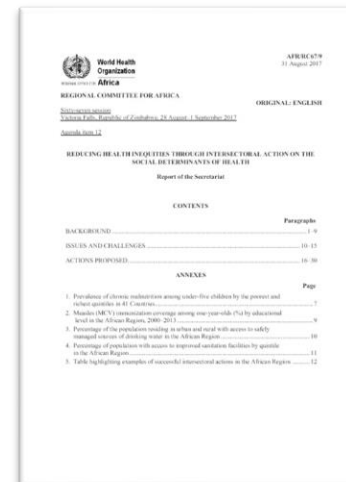
WHO Region of the Americas



WHO South-East Asian Region



WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region



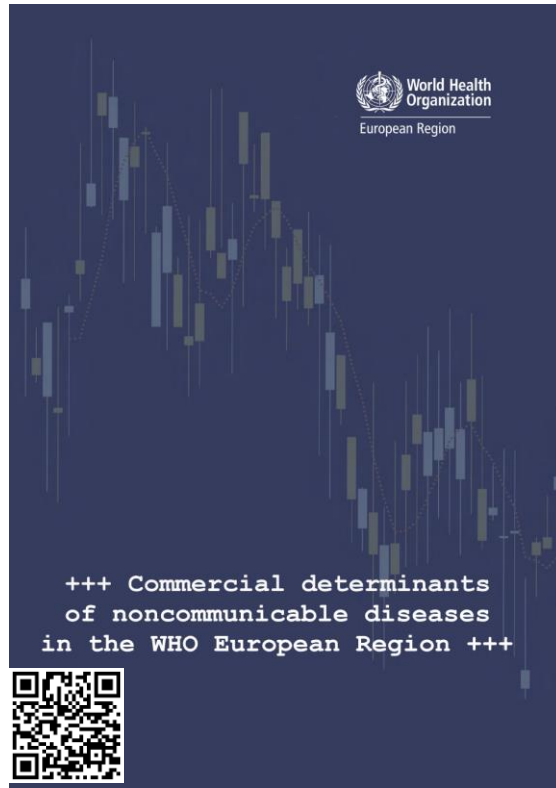
WHO African Region



WHO African Region

A Focus on Commercial Determinants of NCDs

WHO FCTC: A Pathfinder for CDoH



WHO EURO report on CD of NCDs



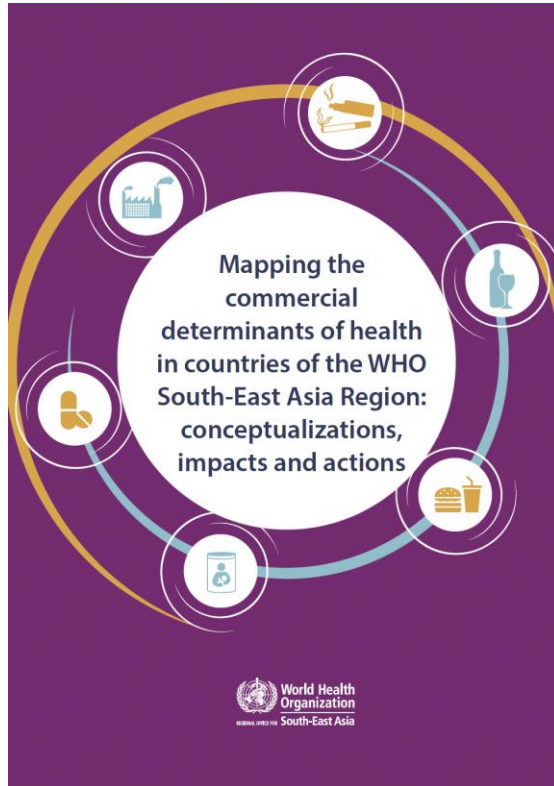
WHO Tool for Supporting Member States in NCD-related private sector engagement

Caribbean Sub-Region Work on Governance for CD of NCDs



Broader commercial determinants

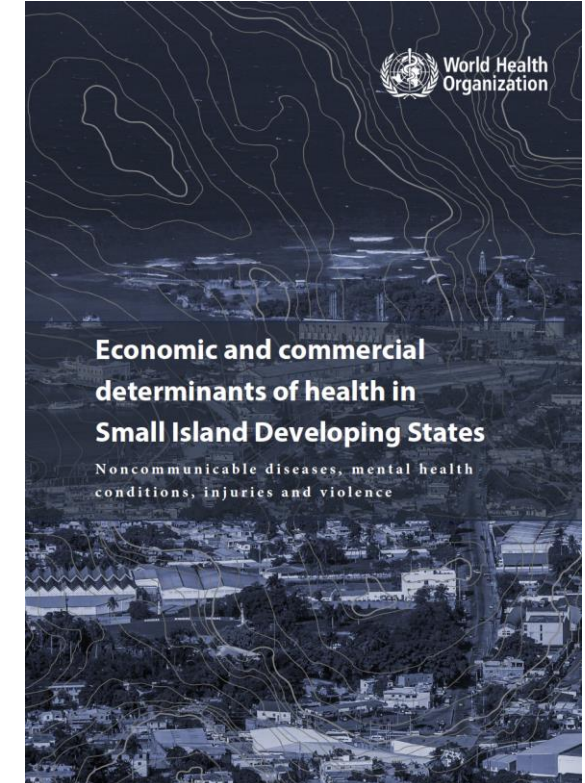
WHO SEARO report on
CDoH — Feb 2025



WHO Report on Social Determinants
of Health Equity — May 2025



WHO Report on CD of NCDs,
Injuries, MHC in SIDS — May 2025



Further Resources

Lancet series on the Commercial Determinants of Health (2023)

<https://www.who.int/news/item/24-03-2023-experts-call-for-action-on-the-commercial-determinants-of-health-and-health-equity>

Dr Tedros: Commentary - Achieving health for all requires action on the economic and commercial determinants of health (2023)

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)00574-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)00574-3/fulltext)

UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health: Report to the UN General Assembly - Racism and the right to health (page 14; 2022)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a77197-report-special-rapporteur-right-everyone-enjoyment-highest>

WHO Factsheet on the Commercial Determinants of Health (2023)

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/commercial-determinants-of-health>

WHO Webinar Series: Commercial Determinants of Health

- Webinar 1: Commercial Determinants – what are they? Why do they matter? What can we do?
<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2021/12/07/default-calendar/commercial-determinants-of-health-what-are-they-why-do-they-matter-what-can-we-do>
- Webinar 2: Commercial Determinants – measuring what matters to inform action
<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2022/09/06/default-calendar/commercial-determinants-of-health-measuring-what-matters-to-inform-action>
- Webinar 3: Commercial Determinants – data, digital spaces and misinformation
<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2022/12/16/default-calendar/commercial-determinants-of-health--data--digital-spaces-and-misinformation>
- Webinar 4: Commercial determinants – sustainable development, pandemic recovery and the Right to Health
<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2023/05/17/default-calendar/commercial-determinants-of-health--sustainable-development--pandemic-recovery-and-realizing-the-right-to-health>
- Webinar 5: Commercial Determinants of Health: Policy, Accountability and Trust: Governing the Commercial Determinants of Health
<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2024/01/23/default-calendar/commercial-determinants-of-health--policy--accountability-and-trust--governing-the-commercial-determinants-of-health>
- Webinar 6: Partnership, Equity and Community: Civil Society Leadership for the Commercial Determinants of Health
<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2024/10/29/default-calendar/partnership--equity-and-community--civil-society-leadership-for-the-commercial-determinants-of-health>

Eurohealth Journal: Commercial Determinants of Cancer Control Policy (2022)

[https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/publications/i/commercial-determinants-of-cancer-control-policy-\(eurohealth\)](https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/publications/i/commercial-determinants-of-cancer-control-policy-(eurohealth))

Final Meeting Summary. WHO Strategic Meeting on Social Determinants of Health, 12–13 September; 2019; Geneva, Switzerland. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2020

https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/social-determinants-of-health/14138_legislation_manual_summary_dec17_final.pdf?sfvrsn=d5a289b6_5

Report by the Director General of the WHO to Executive Board EB142/15. Preparation for the third High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, 2018

https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB142/B142_15-en.pdf

