

Canada's work at APEC gives us a healthcare system we can stand behind



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Much of the good work undertaken at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum doesn't make headlines here at home. But Canada has been leading the way on ethics in healthcare and it's a story we should be proud to share.

This impressive wave of change that buoyed up global health leaders at APEC began on Canadian shores. Canada's innovative pharmaceutical industry led the way in widely adopting APEC principles for the codes of ethics in the biopharmaceutical sector that became known as the Mexico City Principles. These principles are intended as guidelines for industry associations within each APEC economy to develop and implement codes of their own. It's a story of Canadian leadership—of a business model with the capacity to revolutionize the healthcare collaborative both here and abroad. Canada should be commended, and so should industry.

The banner achievement coming out of Manila last November was meeting the Nanjing Declaration's target: doubling the number of industry association codes of ethics, from 33 to 67 in just three years and expanding high standards to nearly 19,000 enterprises in two sectors. This initiative is a model of multi-stakeholder collaboration between the United States and Canada—a bold initiative aimed at overcoming a major challenge to business, trade and growth in both economies. It is altering the landscape across the Asia-Pacific region to strengthen the business environment.

This platform constitutes the world's largest collective action to strengthen business ethics in the biopharmaceutical sector. With inputs from more than 1,000 public and private sector stakeholders, it builds capacity to the highest standards for all industry actors and facilitates multi-stakeholder ethical collaborations. It is also the only platform within which industry efforts to strengthen ethical practices are reported to and supported by heads of state.

As these APEC member economies take the model back to their respective healthcare networks, Canadian brand-name pharmaceutical companies stand arm-in-arm in their commitment to behaving ethically in all they do. It is more than a culture among a few research and development companies. It is an unwavering mantra across a robust membership.

The model seems simple enough. It puts the patient first. It adopts a firm practice of accountability and transparency. It frowns upon misrepresentation of products. It is about not just gaining trust, but deserving it. It welcomes

collaboration at all levels. Ultimately, it is a model with the capacity to cultivate a wider ecosystem of partnerships with a single goal—making healthcare better.

In order for the biopharmaceutical sector to succeed and to achieve sustainability across the Asia-Pacific it must build and maintain trust with regulators, healthcare professionals, payers, patients and the public. The presence and perception of unethical behaviour in the sector undermines trust. They also lead to significant adverse consequences for research-based, multi-national enterprises, from stifled collaboration and innovation to loss of reputation and brand strength. These consequences have a direct effect on every segment of the business. They also erode industry's efforts help patients. So why take this path? Specifically for every single one of these reasons.

Indeed, the industry has a collective incentive and responsibility—to itself, its partners, and its patients—to strengthen and harmonize ethical business practices. Is it enough to shatter negative perceptions on the global stage? Not in and of itself. But there is a cross-sectoral commitment to ethics over corruption, transparency over secrecy, accuracy over misrepresentation, trust-building over negligence, and safety over sales. Add that to the long list of good that comes out of the industry: discovery, innovation, development, and—yes, at times—a cure. Then include the new medicines that improve and prolong the lives of Canadians of all ages. This shift is helping to change the face of an industry that has taken and continues to make great strides in saving lives.

We are all drawn into the healthcare system at some point in our lives: as an advocate, a caregiver or most likely, as a patient. For that very reason we should take notice of the environment APEC has created—and our country and industry leadership at the table—in order to push for a code that puts patients first. The sum total: a life sciences sector the public can stand behind, in which business and government can invest and engage, and in which innovation has more room to grow which means access to medicines for people who need them.

It is worth taking a moment to celebrate this achievement spearheaded by Canada and by Canada's research-based pharmaceutical companies. There are "takeaways" in this for everyone and the best way for Canada to keep affecting change on the world stage is to take what might seem like a single dormant issue, pick it up alongside domestic industry, and trail blaze for the rest of the world to see and follow. **P&I**