UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

LAW for HEALTH and LIFE

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT AND CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Building Bridges for Medicines Justice: Law and Civil Society Engagement for Access & Innovation

Deadline to submit an abstract: 22 April 2025

About the conference

Law for Health and Life at the University of Amsterdam invites you to this in-person conference on 28-29 October 2025 at De Brug, University of Amsterdam, Roeterseilandcampus in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

This conference builds upon a fundamental human rights framework to critically examine law, regulation and policy interventions for 'medicines justice' – defined as sustainable and equitable access to safe, effective, affordable medicines of assured quality from national, European and global perspectives. This conference seeks to:

1. Critically analyse the role of law, regulation, and policy in shaping medicines justice by drawing on interdisciplinary evidence and examining how legal frameworks influence needs-based innovation and equitable access to medicines at national, regional, and global levels.
2. Investigate how legal mechanisms can be used to enforce state responsibilities, regulate corporate power, and promote medicines justice worldwide.
3. Explore strategies for achieving medicines justice through effective governance, underpinned by robust legal frameworks, political will, transparency, accountability, inclusion of stakeholders and the management of conflicts of interest.

Find more information about this conference on the website.

Call for abstracts

Longstanding problems, such as persistent high medicines prices (e.g. for orphan or cancer medicines) and lack of innovative medicines in key areas (e.g. antibiotics, vaccines) impair progress towards 'medicines justice' – defined as sustainable and equitable access to safe, effective, affordable medicines of assured quality. Lawmakers, regulators, and judges have significant power to adopt, implement, and/or enforce legal standards and rules in the public interest, and with this, the potential to shape equitable and just access to medicines in Europe and globally. At the same time, pharmaceutical companies leverage their power to navigate existing legal frameworks in ways that prioritise profit, sometimes shaping and influencing the decisions of political actors responsible for creating and implementing those frameworks. Law and regulation are critical in regulating public powers and for appropriately incentivising, and where needed, limiting private powers to achieve medicines justice.

One of the greatest barriers to achieving medicines justice worldwide is the persistence of legal, regulatory, and policy frameworks that fail to regulate the pharmaceutical sector sufficiently to achieve equitable access. Identifying, assessing, and reforming problematic norms and rules is a complex challenge, made even more difficult by overlapping national, regional, and international legal regimes. Advancing medicines justice requires not only identifying barriers but also designing and advocating for legal and policy reforms that promote equitable access. To achieve this, we must also focus on how to collaborate with patients, consumers, health providers and other concerned actors, and across governance levels (national, EU, global) to build a coherent governance framework. What rules or standards—whether in national laws, international agreements, or regulatory frameworks—could be introduced or reformed to drive meaningful change? How can these reforms be informed by a broader set of (public) actors to create more inclusive, effective, and democratic governance for medicines justice? Given the need for political and public buy-in, which legal and normative arguments can effectively push these reforms forward, and why have some of these arguments struggled to gain traction?

While international law provides crucial guidance—through UN human rights treaties, WHO pandemic treaty negotiations, and WTO trade rules—we are witnessing a shift away from multilateral health governance toward nationalism and regionalism. For example, the European Union has expanded its influence through initiatives like the 2020 Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe, the 2022 EU Global Health Strategy, and the ongoing reform of the EU's pharmaceutical legislation despite lacking a strong internal mandate in global health and pharmaceuticals. With its regulatory power shaping markets, industry practices, and state policies worldwide, the EU is an increasingly critical player in global medicines justice. These developments also underscore the need for a closer examination of how broad legal principles translate into practice implications for global medicines justice.

Legal principles often face criticism for being too broad or vague—yet in an era of fragmented supply chains, digital pharmaceutical platforms, and global health threats, defining clear responsibilities for pharmaceutical companies is more urgent than ever. How can we better define the role of various governance actors (at local, national, and international levels) in holding companies accountable? How can general legal principles be translated into precise regulatory standards that promote medicines justice? For example, which legal and policy standards can help determine what constitutes an "excessive" medicines price? Or, how should we distinguish between advertising and medical information in the digital age?

Pharmaceutical policy is rife with competing legal interests—balancing individual patient rights with population health, local priorities with global responsibilities, and private industrial interests with public health needs. How can we identify and address the effects of existing governance frameworks that have sidelined certain rights and hindered medicines justice? How have decision-makers accounted for human and patient rights in pharmaceutical law, regulation and policy, and where have these rights been sidelined? What legal and policy tools can help resolve these tensions and ensure medicines justice for all?

Non-state actors—pharmaceutical companies, consulting firms, and public-private partnerships—play a crucial role in shaping access to medicines. How can collaborative governance frameworks hold these non-state actors accountable, ensuring their actions align

with the goal of medicines justice? What mechanisms exist to compel states to enforce accountability within existing legal frameworks? For example, how can states be compelled to condition public funding on technology transfer, fair pricing, or equitable distribution?

Achieving medicines justice requires thinking beyond traditional health law. Insights from environmental law, contract law, and tort law offer fresh legal "hooks" to reinterpret existing norms, introduce new ones, or enforce them, that support equitable access to medicines. How can we integrate insights from various legal fields and collaborative governance processes to create a more just and effective global medicines framework?

Call for submissions

We welcome presentations that explore these critical questions through legal, regulatory, and interdisciplinary lenses. We invite presentations that explore creative legal strategies, cross-sectoral inspiration, and innovative regulatory approaches to embed medicines justice within evolving legal frameworks. We invite papers exploring the role of regional actors (e.g. European Union, African Union) and their legal and policy frameworks in shaping (global) pharmaceutical markets and global health equity. We also seek presentations that contribute important evidence and arguments from other disciplines that problematise or evaluate how legal and regulatory frameworks function in practice, and/or provide guidance on realising collaborative governance in the pharmaceutical sector.

Contributors may propose:

- Individual presentation (10-15 minutes)
- Organised Workshop (1 Hour) - 3-4 short presentations + discussion with one chair who is not a presenter

See our website for more information about making your submission by 22 April 2025.