

# Drug companies want FTA changes

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A group representing major international drug manufacturers urged the federal government to make changes to the US free trade agreement, claiming many companies were considering ending research and development in Australia.

Negotiations leading towards final ratification of the agreement are believed to be at a delicate stage.

The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Associations (IFPMA) is believed to be most at odds with the Australian parliament's amendment preventing drug companies from taking out repeated patents on their products to stop competition from cheaper generic brands.

IFPMA spokesman Eric Noehrenberg said this could force companies to move elsewhere for their research and development (R&D).

"R&D can be done anywhere in the world. Singapore, for example, really rolled out the red carpet to bring in companies. Of course, Singapore's quite a nice place to do research as well," Dr Noehrenberg told ABC radio.

"So, it's not a question of preventing us from doing innovation, it's more a question of does Australia want companies to do innovation in Australia?"

"Do they want them to introduce innovative products into Australia?"

"These amendments give us a signal saying 'No, Australia doesn't want that!'"

Dr Noehrenberg said Australia should consider what the amendments were actually achieving.

"We'd appreciate a review of these amendments, to just say 'Are they necessary?' and, if not, 'Is there a way of perhaps repealing them?'," he said.

David Henry, a former member of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, and professor of clinical pharmacology at Newcastle University, said the companies were extremely influential, particularly with the US government.

"They seem to be influential with the Australian (Australian) government, so they have a habit of achieving their aims, by heavying the different governments around the world," Professor Henry said.