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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: protecting the private good?

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After revelations that the CDC is receiving some funding from industry, **Jeanne Lenzer** investigates how it might have affected the organisation's decisions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) includes the following disclaimer with its recommendations: "CDC, our planners, and our content experts wish to disclose they have no financial interests or other relationships with the manufacturers of commercial products . . . CDC does not accept commercial support."¹

The CDC's image as an independent watchdog over the public health has given it enormous prestige, and its recommendations are occasionally enforced by law.

Despite the agency's disclaimer, the CDC does receive millions of dollars in industry gifts and funding, both directly and indirectly, and several recent CDC actions and recommendations have raised questions about the science it cites, the clinical guidelines it promotes, and the money it is taking.

Marcia Angell, former editor in chief of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, told *The BMJ*, "The CDC has enormous credibility among physicians, in no small part because the agency is generally thought to be free of industry bias. Financial dealings with biopharmaceutical companies threaten that reputation."²

Industry funding of the CDC has taken many doctors, even some who worked for CDC, by surprise. Philip Lederer, an infectious diseases fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, and a former CDC epidemic intelligence service officer, told *The BMJ* he was "saddened" to learn of industry funding.

The CDC's director, Tom Frieden, did not respond to a question about the disclaimer. He told *The BMJ* by email, "Public-private partnerships allow CDC to do more, faster. The agency's core values of accountability, respect, and integrity guide the way CDC spends the funds entrusted to it. When possible conflicts of interests arise, we take a hard, ...

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