

World Health Organisation 'taking cash handouts from Coca-Cola to plug black holes in budget'

- The Pan American office has accepted \$50,000 from Coca-Cola, \$150,000 from Nestle and \$150,000 from Unilever
- It has also been relying on the food and beverage industry for advice on how to fight obesity

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The World Health Organisation has taken thousands of pounds from food companies such as Coca-Cola and Nestle.

A regional WHO office has also taken donations from Ben & Jerry's ice cream and Unilever, according to a study.

The Pan American office – known as PAHO – has received £35,000 in donations from Coca-Cola, £100,000 from Nestle and a similar amount from Unilever.



Controversial: The Pan American Health Organisation has been relying on the food and beverage industry for advice on how to fight obesity as well as accepting big donations from the fast food industry

The WHO is the public health arm of the UN and fights chronic ailments such as diabetes and heart disease, caused primarily by unhealthy diets.

The Pan American Health Organisation has also been relying on the food and beverage industry for advice on how to fight obesity.

Accepting industry funding goes against WHO's worldwide policies.

The Pan American office - known as PAHO, based in Washington - has so far accepted \$50,000 from Coca-Cola, the world's largest beverage company, \$150,000 from Nestle, the world's largest food company, and \$150,000 from Unilever, whose brands include Ben & Jerry's ice cream and Popsicles.

The cash donations were described by Irene Klinger, a senior adviser for partnerships in PAHO, as 'a new way of doing business.' However, she insisted WHO is careful to maintain control of its policy decisions.

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On board, Coca-Cola has placed a top official on the steering board for a WHO group that helps determine how WHO fights obesity in Mexico

WHO is increasingly relying on 'partnerships' with the industry, instead of maintaining neutrality like it always has done, to fill holes in its budget. However, it still refuses to partner with the tobacco industry.

Since 2010 WHO has cut its own funding for chronic disease programs by 20 per cent. These diseases cause 63 per cent of premature deaths worldwide, but the WHO department in charge of fighting them receives just six percent of the UN's budget.

Boyd Swinburn, an Australian professor and longtime member of WHO's nutrition advisory committees, said: 'WHO is getting hijacked. They're cash-strapped, and they're bringing the private sector in. That's very dangerous.'

However, Jorge Casimiro, Coca-Cola's director of international government relations and public affairs, said: 'It's about the convergence of the interests. What we're trying to say is we're ready to take action. We're companies who want to do this. We're ready to go.'

Meanwhile, Coca-Cola has also placed a top official on the steering board for WHO's Pan American Forum for Action on Non-Communicable Diseases, a group that helps determine how WHO fights obesity in Mexico.

WHO's Geneva headquarters and five other regional offices have been stopped from accepting money from the food and soda industries, among others.

Spokesman Gregory Härtl said: 'If such conflicts of interest were perceived to exist, or actually existed, this would jeopardize WHO's ability to set globally recognized and respected standards and guidelines.'

It has also emerged that at least two of specially appointed nutrition advisers working on behalf of WHO had direct financial ties to the food industry.

Murray Skeaff, a New Zealand professor, received research money from Unilever, the conglomerate with \$60 billion sales last year.

Esté Vorster, a South African professor, advised a sugar association and took travel and 'after hours' money to judge a contest for Nestle. Vorster said she does not participate in discussing the



sugar guideline.

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