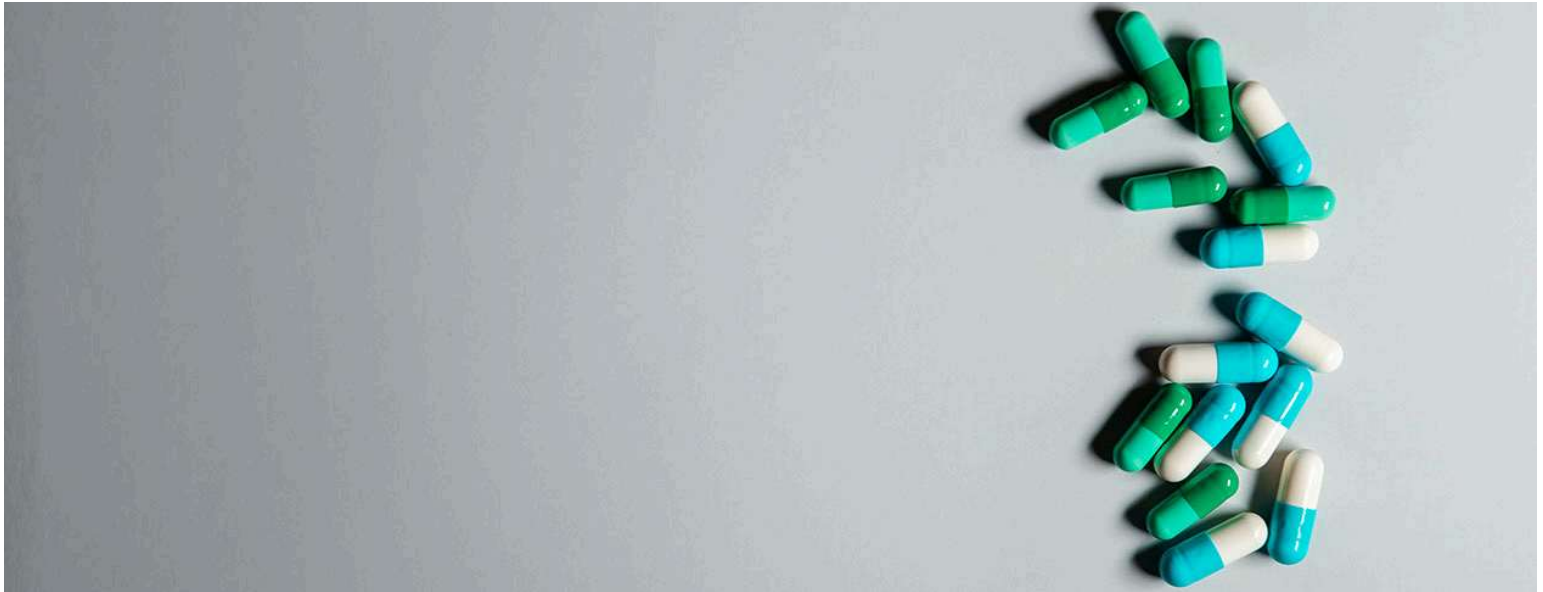
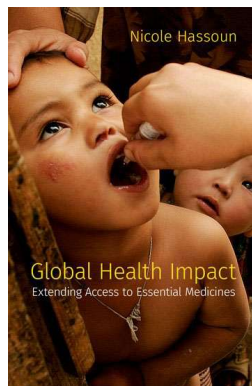




How protecting human rights can help us increase our Global Health Impact



Global Health Impact: Extending Access to Essential Medicines

[BUY NOW](#)

(HTTP
HEAL
IMPA
97801

BY NICOLE HASSOUN ([HTTPS://BLOG.OUP.COM/AUTHORS/NICOLE-HASSOUN/](https://blog.oup.com/authors/nicole-hassoun/))

SEPTEMBER 12TH 2020

As the COVID-19 pandemic surges across the world, justice and equality demand our attention. Does everyone have a human right to health and to access new essential medicines researchers develop? Can pharmaceutical companies patent the medicines and charge high prices, selling them to whoever can pay the most? How can data help us address global health problems like the coronavirus?

I believe everyone should have a legally enforced human right to health that gives them a right to access essential medicines. Essential medicines are important for even a basic minimum of health and the human right to health is justified, in part, because it protects everyone's ability to live at least minimally well. Governmental, and sometimes non-governmental, organizations should help people access essential medicines and no one should make it difficult or impossible for people to secure them.

The human right to health is important for protecting everyone's ability to live minimally well, in part, because it gives rise to what I call *the virtue of creative resolve*—a fundamental commitment to overcoming apparent tragedy. That is, those committed to fulfilling the right often refuse to accept that doing so is impossible, come up with creative ways of fulfilling the right, and act to fulfill it.

Those who lead efforts to improve public health often exhibit the virtue. Consider how human rights advocates galvanized a global effort to extend access on essential medicines for HIV. Activists simply refused to accept pharmaceutical companies' claim that it was impossible to lower prices and educated patients to demand access to treatment. Mass protests and generic completion brought prices down from \$12,000 per patient per year to \$350.

Or consider how one human rights organization, Partners in Health, fought drug resistant TB when no one thought it was possible to do so. They refused to accept the "conventional wisdom" that it was impossible to help people with drug resistant TB in developing countries. Partners in Health hired community health workers to help people access treatment even in some of the world's poorest countries. By showing that it was possible to get good treatment outcomes, they greatly increased funding for TB treatment around the world.

Similar efforts have transformed the global health landscape by helping us eliminate smallpox and reduce the prevalence of many other devastating diseases like polio and Ebola, and creative resolve can help us combat COVID-19 and extend access on essential medicines more broadly. Rather than simply accepting that it is impossible to help everyone secure new drugs and technologies for serious illnesses like COVID-19, we should find ways of working together to meet those needs. One possibility is to rework the incentives pharmaceutical companies, and other health organizations, face for producing and helping people access new drugs.

There are many reasons people cannot access the essential medicines they need but one is that companies make the most money by lobbying to extend monopolies on their interventions that let them set high prices only the richest can afford. I believe pharmaceutical companies fail to respect, and even violate, people's human rights to health when they do this.

Good data, for instance through the Global Health Impact, can create incentives for pharmaceutical companies to stop violating rights and start living up to their obligations. By measuring medicines' global health consequences, socially responsible investors, ethical consumers, and others can support companies that are having the greatest Global Health Impact (<http://global-health-impact.org/new>). Researchers can, for instance, give companies with the best medicines a Global Health Impact label to use on everything they make—from pet vitamins to mouth wash. If even a small proportion of consumers make purchasing decisions on this basis, that can create a large incentive for companies to do what gets them highly rated: increase their Global Health Impact. Moreover, there is some rigorous empirical evidence that such labels affect brand perception.

I think consumers should support such initiatives if doing so becomes a realistic possibility. People may be free to purchase what they wish under just institutions that will make sure the consequences of their actions are acceptable. But few of us live in such ideal conditions. Absent just institutions, we should consume in ways that bring about positive change and ensure that we are not complicit in supporting companies violating rights or failing to live up to their responsibilities.

Many people desperately need essential medicines for malaria, TB, HIV/AIDS, and other global health threats as well as to fight COVID-19. How we think about health and human rights, and what we do to encourage pharmaceutical companies and others to extend access to essential medicines around the world, can save millions of lives. I believe that by embracing the human right to health, and acting with creative resolve, we can work together to overcome tragedy.

Feature image by Wengang Zhai on Unsplash (<https://unsplash.com/photos/BFB7ydn1-DI>).

Nicole Hassoun is Professor of Philosophy at Binghamton University and Visiting Scholar at Cornell University. She co-directs the Institute for Justice and Well-Being and is affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Bioethics and Health Law. She is the author of Global Health Impact: Extending Access to Essential Medicines (<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/global-health-impact->

9780197514993) (Oxford, 2020), *Globalization and Global Justice* and has published widely in journals including *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Journal of Development Economics*, *PLoS One*, *The European Journal of Philosophy*, *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, and *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.

POSTED IN: [ARTS & HUMANITIES \(HTTPS://BLOG.OUP.COM/CATEGORY/ARTS_AND_HUMANITIES/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/arts_and_humanities/), / [HEALTH & MEDICINE \(HTTPS://BLOG.OUP.COM/CATEGORY/SCIENCE_MEDICINE/HEALTH_MEDICINE/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/science_medicine/health_medicine/), / [PHILOSOPHY \(HTTPS://BLOG.OUP.COM/CATEGORY/ARTS_AND_HUMANITIES/PHILOSOPHY/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/arts_and_humanities/philosophy/) / [SCIENCE & MEDICINE \(HTTPS://BLOG.OUP.COM/CATEGORY/SCIENCE_MEDICINE/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/science_medicine/)

Subscribe to the OUPblog via email:

Our [Privacy Policy \(https://global.oup.com/privacy\)](https://global.oup.com/privacy) sets out how Oxford University Press handles your personal information, and your rights to object to your personal information being used for marketing to you or being processed as part of our business activities.

We will only use your personal information to register you for OUPblog articles.

Or subscribe to articles in the subject area by [email \(http://blog.oup.com/subscribe-oupblog-via-email/\)](http://blog.oup.com/subscribe-oupblog-via-email/) or [RSS \(http://blog.oup.com/follow/\)](http://blog.oup.com/follow/).

Related Posts:

No related posts.

Recent Comments

[Dental clinic Ross Township \(https://debonisdental.com/restorative-dentistry/\)](https://debonisdental.com/restorative-dentistry/) 16TH SEPTEMBER 2020

Health facilities should be for all people. It is essential that people are able to find equal facilities and care. There are many organizations that are working towards this field by providing good facilities to people. Keep posting more good information on this!

[Dental clinic Ross Township \(https://debonisdental.com/restorative-dentistry/\)](https://debonisdental.com/restorative-dentistry/).

Comments are closed.

- [About Us \(https://blog.oup.com/about/\)](https://blog.oup.com/about/)
- [Follow Us \(https://blog.oup.com/follow/\)](https://blog.oup.com/follow/)
- [Contact Us \(https://blog.oup.com/contact/\)](https://blog.oup.com/contact/)
- [Terms and Conditions of Use \(https://blog.oup.com/terms_and_condi/\)](https://blog.oup.com/terms_and_condi/)
- [Reuse of Blog Content \(https://blog.oup.com/reuse-of-oupblog-content/\)](https://blog.oup.com/reuse-of-oupblog-content/)
- [Cookie Policy \(http://global.oup.com/cookiepolicy/\)](http://global.oup.com/cookiepolicy/)
- [Privacy Policy \(https://global.oup.com/privacy\)](https://global.oup.com/privacy)

Categories

- [Arts & Humanities \(https://blog.oup.com/category/arts_and_humanities/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/arts_and_humanities/)
- [History \(https://blog.oup.com/category/history/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/history/)
- [Language \(https://blog.oup.com/category/language-words/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/language-words/)
- [Law \(https://blog.oup.com/category/law-legal/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/law-legal/)
- [Science & Medicine \(https://blog.oup.com/category/science_medicine/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/science_medicine/)
- [Social Sciences \(https://blog.oup.com/category/social_sciences/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/social_sciences/)
- [Multimedia \(https://blog.oup.com/category/multimedia/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/multimedia/)
- [Series & Columns \(https://blog.oup.com/category/series-columns/\)](https://blog.oup.com/category/series-columns/)

Social Media

- [Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com/OUPAcademic\)](https://www.facebook.com/OUPAcademic)
- [Twitter \(https://twitter.com/OUPAcademic\)](https://twitter.com/OUPAcademic)
- [LinkedIn \(https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/oup-academic/\)](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/oup-academic/)

- [YouTube \(https://www.youtube.com/OUPAcademic\)](https://www.youtube.com/OUPAcademic)
- [Soundcloud \(https://soundcloud.com/oupacademic\)](https://soundcloud.com/oupacademic)
- [Sina Weibo \(http://weibo.com/oupacademic\)](http://weibo.com/oupacademic)

Gateways

- [Oxford Academic \(http://global.oup.com/academic/\)](http://global.oup.com/academic/)
- [Oxford Journals \(http://www.oxfordjournals.org/\)](http://www.oxfordjournals.org/)
- [Oxford Online \(http://global.oup.com/online/\)](http://global.oup.com/online/)
- [Higher Education \(http://global.oup.com/ushe/\)](http://global.oup.com/ushe/)
- [Oxford Languages \(https://languages.oup.com/\)](https://languages.oup.com/)
- [OUP Worldwide \(http://global.oup.com/\)](http://global.oup.com/)
- [University of Oxford \(http://www.ox.ac.uk/\)](http://www.ox.ac.uk/)

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide.



Copyright © Oxford University Press 2025