

July 1, 2015

Dear Honourable Heads of Government of CARICOM,

The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) embraces this opportunity to share our important work with you, the leaders of our region, at this, *The 36th Regular Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)*. We hereby present you with a copy of a seminal report produced by the HCC in 2014 entitled: '*Civil Society Regional Status Report: Response to NCDs in the Caribbean Community*'.

The HCC was formed in 2008, in response to the 2007 Port of Spain Declaration of Heads of Government of CARICOM "Uniting to Stop the Epidemic of Chronic Non communicable Diseases". The HCC is a regional alliance of Caribbean health NGOs and civil society organizations with the remit to combat chronic diseases (NCDs) and their associated risk factors and conditions. The mission of the organisation is to harness the power of civil society, in collaboration with government, private enterprise, academia, and international partners, as appropriate, in the development and implementation of plans for the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among empowered Caribbean people. Our membership consists of more than 60 Caribbean-based health NGOs and over 65 non-health NGOs; and in excess of 350 individual members based in the Caribbean and across the globe. The HCC works closely with national, regional and international leaders in NCD prevention to leverage the power of civil society by strengthening and supporting our membership in the implementation of programmes aimed at reducing the morbidity and mortality associated with NCDs. In 2015 HCC signed an MOU with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and we have been in 'Official Relations' with PAHO since 2012. We work closely with CARICOM, UWI and other regional and global institutions.

The meeting of Heads of State in 2007 was a defining moment not only in the Caribbean but globally, singularly heralding a new era of high-level political commitment to addressing the NCD epidemic and challenging leadership from across this planet to acknowledge the gravity of the impending health crisis. Since 2007 there have been many successes including the 2011

UNHLM on NCDs; its successor the UNHLM on NCDs in 2014; and the increasing prioritisation of the NCD issue in this region in such fora as the annual SIDS conferences; CARPHA and PAHO regional NCD related meetings; multi-stakeholders meetings of the HCC; and most recently the June 2015 PAHO NCD Leadership Think Tank meeting '*Forum of Key Stakeholders on NCDs: Advancing the NCD Agenda in the Caribbean*'.

Civil society has played a critical role in shaping the regional response to chronic diseases at all levels including: the generation of evidence to catalyse advocacy and action; driving informed social mobilisation around key issues using electronic and mobile media; engaging public and private health sectors around priority areas for NCD prevention and control through a health systems approach in which all stakeholders work in partnership; and through targeted advocacy aimed at high-level decision makers and policy makers.

NCDs are responsible for 7 out of every 10 deaths in this region resulting in tremendous direct and indirect socioeconomic costs. At the Opening of the Healthy Caribbean 2008 Chronic Disease Conference, Hon. David Thompson, then Prime Minister of Barbados noted '*If left to chance, all the gains achieved in the Caribbean during the march from poverty to relative affluence since Independence can be wiped out by NCDs.*' The urgency of NCDs cannot be overstated. Our fragile small island developing states are perhaps among the most vulnerable.

The HCC is committed to advocating for chronic diseases at the highest levels. We urge the placement of NCDs squarely at the centre of national and regional development agendas, and in this context we are using this opportunity to highlight key issues for your consideration.

The aforementioned Civil Society Regional Status Report on NCDs contained within it a call for action which highlighted priority areas for treatment and control of NCDs in the region. A snapshot of these are listed below:

1. Banning (or at the very least limiting) the marketing of energy dense, high salt and high sugar, foods and beverages to children.
2. Promoting reduction in the consumption sugar sweetened foods and beverages foods high in salts and saturated fats (and promotion of product reformulation).
3. Banning the use/sale of trans fats.
4. Establishment of regional standards for clear, consistent, food labelling.
5. Implementation and enforcement of the FCTC.
6. Promotion of workplace wellness initiatives.
7. Development of policies on physical activity; and development, implementation and monitoring of national strategies on the promotion of physical activity.
8. Development of policies on reduction in harm from alcohol: development, implementation and monitoring of national strategies on the reduction in harm from alcohol.
9. Ensuring all women in the region access to full spectrum of cervical cancer prevention, screening, treatment and care.

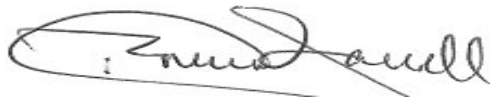
10. Strengthening of NCD Commissions as mechanisms for national multisectoral action (whole of government and whole of society).

There have been notable recent successes, driven in part by civil society advocacy, including the passage of tobacco control legislation in Jamaica and the recently announced 10% excise tax on sugar sweetened beverages in Barbados.

As we approach the United Nations Summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda in September 2015, we urge you, the regional leadership, to once again make our presence known in solidarity with the global community as we pledge our commitment to the sustainable development goals in which are embedded health goals which speak to the NCD epidemic.

The HCC thanks you once again for the continued leadership and we stand poised to provide any support to you, Heads of Government, as you continue to strengthen our regional and national NCD prevention and control programmes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trevor Hassell', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Prof. Sir Trevor Hassell KA, MBBS, FRCP, FACC.  
President, HCC

CC: Sir George Alleyne, Patron HCC  
Directors, HCC  
Mrs. Maisha Hutton, Executive Director, HCC