

## OPEN LETTER TO HCC MEMBERSHIP

June 16, 2015

Dear Members of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition,

### **Government of Barbados Taxation of Sugar Sweetened Beverages**

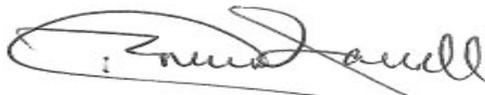
The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) is pleased to announce a major public success in the region. On Monday June 15, 2015, the Government of Barbados (GoB) announced that effective August 1, 2015, a 10% excise tax would be applied to the cost of locally produced and imported sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) such as carbonated soft drinks, juice drinks, sports drinks, and fruit juices. Barbados' Minister of Finance Chris Sinckler made the announcement as he delivered the national budget. The Minister noted: "Beverages containing intrinsic sugars only such as 100 percent natural fruit juice, coconut water, plain milk, evaporated milk will not be subject to the excise tax."

The HCC applauds the bold leadership of the Government of Barbados, the Barbados Ministry of Health and the Barbados National NCD Commission; and congratulates them on this significant public health measure aimed at encouraging Barbadians to consume less sugar. As the only regional alliance of civil society organisations focussed on responding to the epidemic of non communicable diseases (NCDs) in the region, the HCC is committed to promoting and supporting initiatives which seek to create environments which are supportive of changing behaviours which lead to a reduction of disability and deaths related to chronic diseases.

In the Barbados 64% of adults are overweight or obese and some 31% of children are obese or overweight; mirroring data from across the region. Globally, the rising consumption of sugary drinks has been cited as a major contributor to the obesity epidemic. Barbados now joins the ranks of countries such as Finland, France, French Polynesia, Hungary, Mauritius, Samoa, Tonga and most recently Mexico; all of whom tax SSB as a public health measure to reduce consumption of high sugar beverages in an attempt to tackle increasingly obesogenic environments driving skyrocketing obesity rates and related conditions including diabetes, heart disease and cancers. Preliminary findings from Mexico have revealed reductions in the purchase of taxed beverages and increases in the purchase of non-taxed beverages such as water as result of the SBB tax introduced in January 2014.

The GoB has also announced a new VAT-free basket of goods, high in nutritional value, effective September 1, 2015. Foods low in nutritional value will be subject to standard VAT rates. Both of these measures - taxation of SSB and increasing the financial accessibility of a healthy basket of food - create environments in which the healthy choice is the affordable choice. They have the potential not only to change consumer purchasing patterns but to modify general perceptions on healthy diets and catalyse positive behaviour changes. The HCC urges the GoB to adopt policies to ensure that revenue generated through these measures can be appropriately allocated to strengthen strained national health systems which are buckling under the pressure of our region's exploding NCD epidemic.

The HCC calls on all of our membership in the region including civil society, governments and the private sector as well as our international partners to join us in commending the Government of Barbados. We look forward to the adoption of further policies and legislative action throughout the region aimed at creating enabling environments that allow people of the Caribbean to pursue healthy living.



Sir Trevor Hassell, President, HCC



Maisha Hutton, Executive Director, HCC