



Pan American Health Organization



*Regional Office of the
World Health Organization*

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN
SAGICOR LIFE INCORPORATED AND THE HEALTHY CARIBBEAN COALITION
SIGNING CEREMONY

Ms. Joanne De Freitas-

**Madame Chair, Director of the Healthy
Caribbean Coalition & Coordinator
Caribbean Support Centre, UNI Americas**

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**President of the Healthy Caribbean
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Mrs. Deborah Chen-

**Director of the Healthy Caribbean
Coalition, Executive Director of the Heart
Foundation of Jamaica, President Elect of
the InterAmerican Heart Foundation and
Vice President of the World Heart
Federation**

**Distinguished Guests and Invitees
Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen**

A very Good Afternoon to you all

It gives me immense pleasure to bring you greetings on behalf of the Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Margaret Chan, the Director of the Pan American Health Organization and the Regional Director of World Health Organization in the Americas, Dr. Mirta Roses Periago and PAHO's Caribbean Program Coordinator, Dr. Ernest Pate, on this very auspicious occasion of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Sagicor Life Incorporated and the Healthy Caribbean Coalition.

From the perspective of PAHO-WHO, this signing ceremony today marks a very significant step as Sagicor Life tangibly demonstrates its commitment as a socially responsible corporation by providing financial support over a three year period to the secretariat of a Non-Governmental, non-profit, region-wide Organization working in the area of health. That Sagicor Life has partnered with the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, whose focus is to support the development of plans for the prevention and management of chronic diseases among Caribbean peoples is indeed a substantial gesture.

I was particularly pleased last week, when I read in the September 12th edition of one local newspaper that your Vice-President of Group Insurance [Patricia Brathwaite-Marshall] had underscored the fact that Sagicor had deemed it their social responsibility to increase awareness of cancer and other chronic diseases affecting the Caribbean and that your company unequivocally supported the notion that prevention is better than cure.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as you are all aware, the chronic, non-communicable diseases are conditions of long duration, which generally progress slowly. The four major types of non-communicable, chronic diseases include the cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks and strokes; the cancers; the chronic respiratory diseases, such as chronic obstructed pulmonary disease and asthma; and diabetes, the latter with which we are all very familiar and of which we were reminded in a recent Crop-over Calypso of how we like sweet things.

The non-communicable diseases or NCDs, are by far the leading cause of death in the world, accounting for approximately 63 percent of the annual 57 million deaths recorded globally. Roughly 80 percent of these 36 million NCD deaths are occurring in low and middle-income countries, while more than nine million of all NCD deaths are being registered in persons less than 60 years of age.

The total cost of this burden is phenomenal as it includes those direct costs borne by Governments for the screening, diagnosis, treatment and management of these diseases; those direct and indirect societal costs borne by families and communities; those costs borne by employers in relation to absenteeism and presenteeism; and societal and economic costs occasioned by associated disability and premature death. It is, therefore, quite evident that the NCDs constitute not only a health problem but also a considerable development challenge.

In 2006, for example, the United Kingdom experienced a loss of about 175 million days due to absences from chronic diseases among a working population of 37.7 million people. The estimated cost of absences due to illness was over 20 billion pounds in that same year. Obesity also results in significant health care spending and indirect costs, as illustrated by a recent study from the Texas Comptroller, which reported that obesity alone had cost Texas businesses an extra \$9.5 billion in 2009, including more than \$4 billion for health care, \$5 billion for lost productivity and absenteeism, and \$321 million for disability.

The Minister of Health of Barbados in an interview given on 16 September, 2012 in Washington DC, USA, reiterated that NCDs were the biggest health challenge facing this country and that it was consuming 60 percent of the national health budget. Additionally, on occasion, as identified by studies in Jamaica, NCDs may result in medical indigence, as the catastrophic expenditures for treatment may force many people into, or entrench them in poverty.

NCDs are largely preventable by means of effective interventions that tackle those shared risk factors of tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol. WHO NCD Statistics indicate that in 2008, one and a half billion adults, aged 20 and older, were overweight and that in 2010 nearly 43 million children under five years of age were overweight. Review the country NCD Statistics

compiled by the WHO suggests a troubling trend in so many of our Caribbean countries as regards overweight and obesity, as since 1980, the mean body Mass Index has risen appreciably both for men and women. Eliminating these major risk factors could prevent around three-quarters of the heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes and 40 percent of the cancers.

It is against this background of prevention that the vision and mission of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition are firmly anchored. We at PAHO-WHO wish to sincerely congratulate the Healthy Caribbean Coalition on the groundbreaking work that it has already undertaken and on some of the remarkable successes that it has already achieved. One of these notable success stories has been the communication initiative, which HCC mounted in relation to the United Nations High Level Meeting on NCDs in September 2011, when it received 700,000 messages of support for the attendance of CARICOM Leaders.

The global epidemic of the chronic, non-communicable diseases has been the focus of attention and response by the WHO and PAHO, especially over this past decade as there have been numerous resolutions both at the global level of World Health Assembly as well as the Regional level of the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization, which have directed the attention of Member States to the prevention and control of tobacco use as well to the

adoption of obligations under the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control; to strategies and programs to prevent and deter the harmful use of alcohol; to the important need for good nutrition and balanced diets and physical activity, etc.

Today, therefore, we welcome this marriage between Sagikor Life and the Healthy Caribbean Coalition in pursuit of reducing the tremendous burden of NCDs in the Caribbean. Such partnerships are not only supported by WHO and PAHO but also by Caribbean Community, CARICOM, as is expressed in its 2007 Port of Spain Declaration in relation to preventing and controlling the NCD epidemic. It is also very heartening to note that the Healthy Caribbean Coalition fully espouses the WHO-PAHO principles of adopting a “whole of society approach,” in order to effectively address the pressing problem of the NCDs.

In conclusion, the Pan American Health Organization-World Health Organization wishes to wholeheartedly congratulate both of these signing parties for this tremendous forward step towards the enhanced prevention, control and management of chronic non-communicable diseases in the Caribbean. I do sincerely hope that theirs will be an enduring marriage of substance.

Thank you.

DR. MERLE J. LEWIS
18 SEPTEMBER, 2012
UNITED NATIONS HOUSE