

HCC OPEN LETTER

TO CARICOM HEADS OF GOVERNMENT

AT THE 40TH REGULAR MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT
JULY 3-5, 2019, ST. LUCIA

June 28, 2019

Dear Honourable Heads of Government of CARICOM,

On the occasion of this, the Fortieth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) calls on you, Caribbean Heads of Government and State, to indicate your commitment to support the **1st United Nations High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage** to be held on September 23rd in New York during the 74th session of the UN General Assembly and **recommit to prioritise the reduction of childhood overweight and obesity in CARICOM.**

The **1st United Nations High Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage** (HLM-UHC) follows and complements the **3rd High-Level Meeting on NCDs** held in September 2018, at which representation from CARICOM was excellent. We congratulate you for your leadership.

The theme of the HLM-UHC is *'Universal Health Coverage: Moving Together to Build a Healthier World.'* Achieving universal health coverage, including quality essential service coverage and financial protection for all, is target 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This HLM-UHC represents a critical window of opportunity to galvanize the highest level of political support and commitment to creating equitable health systems which ensure 'health for all', including the most marginalized populations. The development of a clear, target-driven political declaration on UHC will assist Member States in moving closer towards achieving WHO's ambitious target of one billion more people benefiting from UHC by 2023.

Strengthening health systems to advance to UHC includes working towards coverage by, and access to, comprehensive, quality health services that address health promotion as well as disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliation. In UHC, these services are available to all, at the time of need, without exposing users to financial difficulties, and have strong primary health care at their centre.

Achieving UHC targets demands multisectoral, whole of government, whole-of-society approaches that include civil society participation. Advances to UHC will significantly support the achievement of non-communicable disease (NCD) targets, which also demand such approaches. In the Caribbean, NCDs are responsible for 80% of deaths, of which 40% occur prematurely, in those under 70 years¹. Although Caribbean health systems have been oriented towards the attainment of health for all, the scale and urgency of the NCD epidemic in the region has placed significant budgetary and service-related strain on health systems, resulting in the growing erosion of health services. Political leadership is needed to address the growing gaps and move the region towards UHC wherein people receive the essential health services that they need, without being exposed to financial hardship.

Achieving UHC will require prioritization among an expanding list of health priorities. The HCC urges Heads of Government and State to continue to place the prevention of overweight and obesity among children high on your agenda. In previous Conferences of Heads of Government (2016, 2017, and 2018), you have collectively recognized the significant scale and potential impact of this problem and committed to take action in key policy areas including: taxation of sugary beverages; implementation of healthy school policies; and introduction of mandatory front-of-package nutrition labelling, and recent polls and surveys undertaken in some CARICOM countries indicate support by the people for efforts to reduce childhood obesity.

In support of the UHC-HLM, the HCC launched the [First United Nations High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage - Technical Brief for CARICOM Countries: A Contribution from Civil Society](#) aimed at Ministries of Finance, Health and other key stakeholders to support full participation in the processes leading up to and beyond the HLM. It outlines key HCC's eight (8) Advocacy Priorities (see page 4) and highlights key advocacy asks including among others, prioritisation of childhood obesity reduction.

¹ <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/ncds-in-the-caribbean/>


In recognition of the HLM-UHC and the nexus between NCDs and UHC, we, the 100+ members of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, **ask CARICOM Heads of Government and State to:**


1. Commit to provide strong global, regional, and national leadership on Universal Health Coverage and NCD prevention and control, and to further commit to the **highest-level national participation at the 1st UN High-Level Meeting on UHC** on September 23rd, 2019.
2. Include a **statement of commitment to attend the 1st UN High-Level Meeting on UHC in the official Communiqué** emerging from the Fortieth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
3. **Support HCC's eight (8) UHC advocacy priorities** (see page 4) as detailed in the *First United Nations High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage -Technical Brief for CARICOM Countries: A Contribution from Civil Society* for inclusion in the HLM-UHC outcome document.
4. **Recommit to prioritise childhood obesity prevention** through the implementation of **nutrition policies** (taxation of sugary beverages, healthy school policies, and mandatory front of package nutrition labeling) as a key step towards reducing NCDs in the region.


The Healthy Caribbean Coalition is committed to providing ongoing support to Caribbean governments and we look forward to your attendance on September 23rd at the **1st UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage** and your **recommitment to prioritise childhood obesity prevention** through the implementation of best practice, evidence-based, policies and legislation.


Board of Directors and members of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition


HCC Advocacy Priorities for the HLM-UHC 2019


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1 Prioritise **prevention** as an essential component of Universal Health Coverage (UHC)
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2 Provide **Primary Health Care (PHC)** as the foundation for UHC
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3 Save lives by increasing **equitable access to quality and affordable essential medicines** and products
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4 Increase **sustainable financing** for health and improve efficiency and investments
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5 Enable **community engagement and empowerment** in UHC design, development, and accountability processes
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6 Strengthen **government leadership and governance of intersectoral actions** that address the social, commercial, and other determinants of health, advance UHC, and contribute to reduction of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and inequities
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7 Develop a **monitoring, evaluation, and accountability** framework to assess the implementation of the commitments made in the HLM-UHC Political Declaration
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8 Implement **communication strategies and mechanisms** to provide updated information for evidence-based policy development and decision-making to key stakeholders, taking advantage of ICT advances

About Healthy Caribbean Coalition

The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) is a registered not-for-profit organisation formed in 2008, arising from the 2007 Declaration of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The HCC is the only regional NCD alliance of over 100 health and non-health civil society organisations (CSOs).

The HCC works closely with regional and international leaders in NCD prevention to leverage the power of civil society by strengthening and supporting its membership in the implementation of programmes aimed at reducing the morbidity and mortality associated with NCDs.