

**ACCELERATING NUTRITION POLICIES IN THE CARIBBEAN:**

**Creating Supportive Environments for Healthy Children**

**September 17-18, 2019, Accra Beach Hotel & Spa, Barbados**

**Official Opening Welcome**

**Honourable Santia Bradshaw, Minister of Education,  
Technological and Vocational Training and Leader of  
Government Business, Barbados**

**Protocol**

**Professor Sir Trevor Hassell President – Healthy Caribbean Coalition**

**Minister of Health and Wellness, Hon. Lt. Colonel Jeffrey Bostic**

**PAHO/WHO Representative in the Office of Eastern Caribbean  
Coordination (OECC), Dr. Godfrey Xuereb**

**Permanent Secretaries**

**Parliamentary Secretaries**

**Senior Medical Officer of Health, NCDs, Dr. Arthur Phillips**

**Chairmen of the NCD Commission**

**Members of the Board of Directors of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition**

**Overseas Delegates**

**Members of the Media**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

## **Introduction**

Good morning, it is with pleasure that I welcome all stakeholders internationally, regionally and nationally, to this critical meeting. Those of you who travelled here from overseas for this meeting I do hope you are afforded the opportunity to see our beautiful island.

This meeting is critical because not only are we addressing issues about non-communicable diseases but serious matters that affect our nation's health and wealth. Our children are our future and it is incumbent on us to safeguard their well-being. Childhood Obesity is now considered the new world epidemic by doctors and the world's fastest health concern. Many significant researchers reveal that several of our children's dietary habits are unhealthy and are contributing to obesity at a rapid rate. My government is cognizant of the exorbitant sums of money spent on treating Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and without a doubt, I can safely say, the figures spent on treating NCDs will increase exponentially if the dietary habits of our children do not change.

Research conducted in 2018 by M.A. St. John and K.A. Rudder, on behalf of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados, revealed that meals offered by canteens in 21 secondary schools are not as healthy as they ought to be. Data showed that the most frequent food items were: white potato fries (88%), burgers (82%),

baked/fried chicken and chips (71%) and rotis (65%). Some schools sold salted, high fat protein (pig tails) snack boxes (18%). It also revealed that meals lacked the incorporation of adequate vegetable servings. Sugar-sweetened beverages were available on all compounds (100%). It must be noted that a 16oz bottle of carbonated drink can contain as much as 18 teaspoons of sugar. Fruits were available at some (13%) of the schools whilst working water fountains were present at (41%).

The Ministry of Education Technological and Vocational Training (METVT) is committed to making schools healthier and safe places for students in order to establish conditions which realize their full potential. Schools cater to the students' holistic development as well as the academic and research shows that health and educational success are intertwined: Schools achieve their primary mission of education when students are healthy. Educational institutions are therefore, strategically placed to create a healthy food environment through the choices of foods offered to the students. Schools also play a vital role in teaching students about sound healthy eating habits and reinforcing those lessons through good school practices.

To this end, my Ministry is in the process of introducing a number of strategies to alleviate the worrisome problem of childhood obesity in Barbados.

The following initiatives are a work in progress at the Ministry of Education, Technical and Vocational Training and after collaboration with multisector partners, initiatives will be rolled out during this school year.

Firstly, A Frame Work for a Food and Nutrition Policy for Private and Public Nursery, Primary and Secondary Schools in Barbados has been drafted. This document is a blueprint which gives directions and guidance to concessionaires and vendors in order to maintain the sale of healthy dishes and snacks as well as maintain high sanitary standards in all spaces of sale of goods on the school's compound. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados must be commended for training canteen concessionaires who presently operate school canteens.

Secondly, Guidelines for Canteen Concessionaires is currently a draft document. This manual serves as a guide for the concessionaires and focuses on suggestions on the type of healthy foods that can be prepared for the school population as well as sanitation and safety. The student body constitutes a captive market for canteen concessionaires who supply up to 1/3 of the daily recommended nutritional requirements for each child. The guidelines therefore gives advice on the quality of food and drink recommended to achieve good health and halt and or decrease overweight among Barbadian children.

Thirdly, a Food Nutrition and Health Quiz and a Food Presentation Competition on NCDs. The over-arching purpose of this activity is to create an interesting and fun-filled way to educate students and all sectors of the population regarding problems related to NCDs. All persons are affiliated to a school in some way and it is hoped that the quiz will attract peoples' attention as all social media platforms will be utilised. It is anticipated that the population will garner information about NCDs through the quiz and how to change their dietary habits to adopt healthy life styles. It is expected that the information garnered from the activity will be shared with family, friends and work colleagues. The other component of the quiz/competition is the food preparation aspect. It is anticipated that there will be creative, attractive, tasty and healthy dishes presented by primary and secondary schools.

Teachers play a very important part in the process of disseminating information and this Ministry will expect that teachers of Home Economics, Science, Physical Education and Health and Family Life Education classes in particular will take the opportunity to integrate information on adopting healthy lifestyles. Additionally, information regarding healthy lifestyles can be conveyed at assemblies,

Finally, school is about the holistic development of the child and health, academics and success are interrelated. Schools cannot achieve their primary mission of education if students are not fit mentally, socially and physically. The growing

issue of Childhood Obesity can be slowed or halted if we focus on addressing the causes. There are other strategies that can be introduced to ensure that students are mentally, socially and physically healthy but my Ministry will work incrementally to ensure that obesogenic environments are eliminated. Ladies and Gentleman, our own Dr. Kenneth George, Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health (Ag.) advises that “We must reverse the increased consumption of foods prepared outside of the home which are highly refined and processed: and increase the consumption of traditional and locally sourced foods.” The Ministry of Education, Technical and Vocational Training intends to work with other Ministries and Non-Governmental Organizations to reverse the troubling trend of childhood obesity. We are ever mindful that they are the ones on whose shoulders the future of our country rests. They must be healthy in order to increase and maintain high levels of productivity necessary to take this country forward; it is our moral responsibility to create healthy spaces in our schools and other environments for our children. The Ministry of Education commends the Healthy Caribbean Coalition for keeping the issues of Childhood Obesity in the minds of the people.

Once again, welcome to Barbados and I wish you a productive meeting.