



## **CONSUMERS RIGHT TO KNOW: JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE HEALTHY CARIBBEAN COALITION AND THE NATIONAL CONSUMERS LEAGUE OF JAMAICA**

November 29, 2019

RIGHT NOW Caribbean countries are deciding whether or not Caribbean Consumers will benefit from access to important health information needed to make healthy food choices through the adoption of 'high in' front of package nutrition warning labels as a key evidence-based, effective public health policy measure. This process is being led by CROSQ (CARICOM Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality). The intended outcome is to approve a revised CARICOM REGIONAL STANDARD: Labelling of Foods – Pre-Packaged Foods – Specification CRS 5: 201X which recommends 'high in' front of package nutrition warning labels.

**Jointly, the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) and the National Consumers League of Jamaica (NCLJ) are calling on Caribbean governments, CROSQ, National Bureaus of Standards of the Caribbean and Caribbean citizens to support the adoption of the revised regional standards with mandatory front of package nutrition warning labels as committed to by [Heads of CARICOM in 2018 at the 39th CARICOM Heads of State and Government Summit](#)<sup>1</sup> and [called for by the Director of PAHO, Dr. Carissa Etienne](#)<sup>2</sup> and called for by the HCC and stakeholders in our September 2019 [Call to Urgent Action](#).<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://caricom.org/cochog/view/communique-issued-at-the-conclusion-of-the-thirty-ninth-regular-meeting-of-the-conference-of-heads-of-government-of-the-caribbean-community>

<sup>2</sup> <https://us10.campaign-archive.com/?u=ed61694edb82f72792f2c093d&id=39652d0405>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/call-to-urgent-action/>

The HCC and the NCL of Jamaica are very concerned about the increasing deaths and morbidity caused by the continued rise in NCDs. While governments and manufacturers search for a middle ground, our consumers are facing severe health risks due to limited choices for healthier food and lack of adequate information on products which allow them to quickly and correctly identify products which have excess fats, salts and sugars.

Unhealthy diets pose a greater risk to morbidity and mortality than tobacco use, alcohol use and unsafe sex combined. The Caribbean has some of the highest levels of obesity and obesity related non communicable diseases (NCDs) including diabetes in the world. The empirical evidence supports that 'high in' or 'excess' front of package nutrition warning labels, are the most effective labelling scheme in terms of helping consumers make informed choices about foods high in fats, salts and sugars. The warning labels raise consumer awareness about processed and ultra processed foods which are high in fats, salt and sugars. These products are linked to noncommunicable diseases NCDs – the category of diseases responsible for the greatest death and disability in the region. Evidence has shown that 'high in' or 'excess' nutrition warning labels modify consumer behavior by shifting their purchases from unhealthy foods to healthier options. Moreover, "high in" systems have proven to influence the purchase decision of consumers towards a more critical and healthier decision and to decrease the intent to purchase products high in nutrients of public health concern (fats, salts and sugars) across different populations.

Fundamentally, this is about the right of consumers to access accurate information about the products they consume. Current labelling schemes do not effectively inform consumers about the nutritional content of the products they consume and are difficult to interpret. This is also an issue of equity. Wealthier, more educated members of society have the greater capacity to decode the universally recognized, difficult to interpret, labelling schemes - whereas the poorest and least educated are most affected due to literacy and economic limitations. Improved labelling of food products by 'high in' front of package nutrition warning labels makes it easy for the most vulnerable populations to make healthier food selections.

Many countries across the world have implemented 'high in' or 'excess' front of package nutrition warning labels in recognition of the epidemic of NCDs which is taking lives and undermining economies. We are lagging behind. The Caribbean was among the first to tax sugary beverages. Given our high burden of NCDs and limited economic resources, policies such as this should be an urgent public health priority.

Caribbean citizens have the **RIGHT TO KNOW** what is in their food and moreover, when the levels of nutrients associated with NCDs, exceed WHO-recommended intake goals. This information is essential in order to shift consumption away from foods high in fats, salts and sugars to healthier options. Governments are the main duty bearers in the rights-based approach and must transparently protect and promote this right to access information and right to health, through the implementation of public health policies.

**‘High in’ Front of Package Nutrition Warning Labels will help Caribbean citizens make healthier food choices. This is about access to information. Caribbean consumers have a Right to Know.**

**Make your voice heard. Reach out to your local Bureau of National Standards and let them know you support 'high in' mandatory front of package nutrition warning labels.**