



HCC OPEN LETTER

TO DR. THE HONOURABLE DUANE SANDS

MINISTER OF HEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

And

TO THE HONOURABLE JEFFREY LEONARD LLOYD

MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF THE BAHAMAS

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A BAN ON SUGAR SWEETENED BEVERAGES IN BAHAMIAN SCHOOLS AND HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 1, 2019

November 5, 2019

Dear Dr. The Honourable Duane Sands and The Honourable Jeffrey Lloyd,

The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) wishes to congratulate the Bahamas Ministries of Health and Education and the Government of The Bahamas on your recent announcement that sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) will be banned from all public schools and government healthcare facilities effective December 1, 2019. This action taken by the Government of The Bahamas supports the HCC [Civil Society Action Plan 2017-2021: Preventing Childhood Obesity in the Caribbean](#) and the recent HCC [Civil Society Call to Urgent Action for the Caribbean region to Accelerate Nutrition Policies for the Creation of Healthy Environments for Caribbean Children](#), both of which call on the Governments of CARICOM countries to implement a package of evidence based policy actions aimed at tackling childhood obesity – including a ban

on the sale and marketing of sweet beverages in and around schools. The Bahamas SSB ban in schools also realises a commitment made by your Honourable Prime Minister Dr. Hubert Minnis, at the 39th Summit of CARICOM Heads of Government and State in 2018 when Heads endorsed a number of priorities for the 3rd UN High Level Meeting on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) including: *“implementing policies geared to preventing childhood obesity, including **health-promoting school environments** and **Front of Package (FOP) labelling**”*.

The HCC strongly supports this policy measure which is part of a wider strategy to combat the urgent epidemic of childhood overweight and obesity we are facing in The Bahamas and the wider Caribbean. We look forward to seeing the details of the policy so it can be shared on HCC’s regional [Childhood Obesity Prevention Scorecard](#) online tracking platform which provides a regional snapshot of policy progress in this critical area of tackling unhealthy weights among the region’s children. This will be useful for other regional governments keen to follow the leadership of Belize, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and now The Bahamas - in taking population-level policy measures to create healthier school environments.

The ban on SSBs in schools aligns with actions endorsed by the World Health Organisation’s [Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity: Implementation Plan](#) which calls for the elimination of the provision or sale of unhealthy foods, such as sugar-sweetened beverages and energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods, in the school environment. The Caribbean has the highest NCD mortality rate in the Americas and 40% of these deaths occur prematurely before the age of 70 years. Obesity is a major underlying factor which contributes to the development of NCDs, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. One in three Caribbean children are either overweight or obese placing them on trajectory for health complications in childhood and adolescence and increased risk of NCDs in adulthood. The Bahamas has some of the highest rates of overweight and obesity in the region and across the world. Among children 5-19 years old, 35.8% are overweight or obese and 17.3% are obese¹. The recent STEPS Survey revealed 92 percent of Bahamians drink one to three cans of a sugary beverage every single day²; and the 2013 GSHS found that 69% of 13-15-year-olds drank carbonated soft drinks one or more times per day³.

Implementation of policies that support obesity prevention and reduction efforts are key to making the environments in which our populations live, work, and grow less obesogenic. The **ban on SSBs in public healthcare facilities**, which is set to coincide with the SSB ban in schools, shows a commitment by the Bahamian Government to create environments that promote healthier diets. Such policy measures, when implemented effectively, create strong regulatory environments which support positive dietary behaviours,

¹ <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/HCC-COP-Fact-Sheet-Bahamas-Oct-2019.pdf>

² <https://www.caribbeannationalweekly.com/caribbean-breaking-news-featured/bahamas-to-ban-sweetened-drinks-from-schools-and-healthcare-facilities/>

³ <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/HCC-COP-Fact-Sheet-Bahamas-Oct-2019.pdf>

help drive product reformulation, and encourage manufacturers and retailers to increase the availability of affordable, healthier food and beverage options. Every Caribbean country is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), thereby underscoring the important role of governments to ensure that those most vulnerable in the population - our children - are protected from continuous exposure to harmful environments that promote consumption of products high in salt, sugar, and trans fats.

The HCC applauds the leadership of the Government of The Bahamas in its actions taken to combat NCDs and welcomes continued bold action in this area through further implementation of the WHO NCD Best Buys.

- The Board of Directors, staff and volunteers of the HCC, Technical Advisors and the 100+ HCC Members including the Healthy Lifestyles Team at the Cancer Society of the Bahamas