



## HCC OPEN LETTER

# TO CARICOM HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT AND MINISTERS OF HEALTH

17 November 2020

Dear Honourable CARICOM Heads of Government and State and Honourable Ministers of Health,

On this occasion of the historic launch of the World Health Organization (WHO) [Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer](#), the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) and its member cancer societies across the Caribbean [call on CARICOM Member States to](#) advance the fulfilment of the 2007 CARICOM Declaration of Port of Spain for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) [by affirming their commitment to eliminate cervical cancer as adopted in Resolution WHA73.2 at the Seventy-third World Health Assembly in August 2020.](#)

[Specifically, the HCC is calling on CARICOM countries to commit to achieving the goals and targets of the WHO Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer:](#)

### [By the year 2030](#)

- [90%](#) HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination coverage of girls (by 15 years of age)
- [70%](#) screening coverage (70% of women are screened with high-performance tests by the ages of 35 and 45 years)
- [90%](#) access to treatment for cervical pre-cancer and management of 90% of invasive cancer cases, including access to palliative care.

Cervical cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among Caribbean women. It is one of the few cancers that can be prevented, yet in 2018, 4,200 women in this region were diagnosed with the disease and 2,464 women needlessly died<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gco.iarc.fr/today/data/factsheets/cancers/23-Cervix-uteri-fact-sheet.pdf>

Over the years, there have been several regional and international interventions for cervical cancer control, including [CARICOM's 2009 efforts to improve cervical cancer treatment in the region](#), and the development of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) [Plan of Action for Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control 2018-2030](#), which provides a blueprint for collective, multi-stakeholder action. All countries and territories in the Caribbean have introduced national HPV vaccination programmes, and screening and treatment capacity are growing. There has been an increase in HPV testing as a component of national screening programmes and greater use of VIA (visual inspection with acetic acid) by health care providers.

Much of the progress made can be attributed to the advocacy and capacity-building efforts of civil society actors such as the Caribbean cancer societies, which work in partnership with local governments, in collaboration with regional and international partners, communities, and women. The HCC has successfully partnered with various international organizations and national cancer societies to advance cervical cancer prevention in the Caribbean through advocacy and action aimed at building the capacity of civil society to educate, vaccinate, screen, diagnose, and treat girls and women.

However, despite the successes, a deficit remains, and the deaths of six women from cervical cancer every day is unconscionable. The HCC has long believed that the goal of eradicating cervical cancer is urgent and achievable, although no small feat in our resource-limited setting. With the launch of the Global Strategy, our goal is within reach, as there is now a framework to drive multistakeholder, Member State-led action towards the attainment of the Strategy's 90-70-90 targets.

As the global public health community celebrates this historic day—the first time the WHO has committed to eradicating a cancer—the HCC re-commits to collaborate with national governments, ministries of health, the health-supporting private sector, and regional and international partners such as PAHO, the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), and CARICOM to move our region closer to eliminating cervical cancer.

If we are to eliminate cervical cancer, strong leadership is also needed. We call on CARICOM governments and regional partners to put in place policies and legislation to facilitate the prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment of cervical cancer, and invest in civil society partnerships to increase and intensify our collective efforts, so that together we may reach the ambitious 90-70-90 targets and ensure that no Caribbean woman dies unnecessarily of this preventable disease. It's time to end cervical cancer in the Caribbean—let's work together to save lives!

- *Signed by The Board of Directors of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition on behalf of HCC member civil society organisations including regional Cancer Societies*