



CPDC
Caribbean Policy Development Centre

Statement from CPDC in support of octagonal front-of-package warning labels –5 May 2021

The Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) expresses support for the implementation of octagonal front of package warning labels (FOPWL) in the Caribbean and the PAHO Nutrient Profile model, which establishes the applicable nutrient thresholds, as a key policy measure towards reducing the burden of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the region.

Front of package warning labelling involves the placement of octagonal warning labels on the front of packaged products which indicate whether the product is “HIGH IN” one or more of the critical nutrients sugar, sodium and fats- nutrients which are evidenced to contribute to obesity and NCDs when consumed in excess^{i,ii,iii,iv}.

NCDs are a significant threat to Caribbean development affecting our people, economy and social systems; approximately 78% of all deaths and 76% of premature deaths (30-69) result from NCDs in the region^{v,vi}. In addition, an alarming 1 in 3 Caribbean children is overweight or obese, which puts them at great risk for developing these diseases in the future. NCDs present a genuine threat to equitable social development as persons in conditions of vulnerability, including children and the elderly, are particularly susceptible to NCD risk factors and are disproportionately impacted by the underlying social and commercial determinants, which contribute to them^{vii}. This is especially concerning in our current environment, given that NCDs increase vulnerability to severe COVID-19 infection^{viii}.

Until May 31st, 2021, CARICOM countries are voting on adopting the [Final Draft CARICOM Regional Standard for Specification for labelling of pre-packaged foods](#) (FDCRS 5:2010), which incorporates front of package warning label specifications. The Caribbean Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) is overseeing this process. It has involved extensive consultations with relevant stakeholders, including industry and commerce, labour and trade unions, academia and research bodies and non-governmental organisations. If supported by at least three-quarters of Member States, the FDCRS 5:2010 will be submitted to the CROSQ Council for approval and then to the CARICOM Council of Trade and Economic Development (COTED) for final endorsement.

FOPWL is an equitable policy measure as it aims to empower all consumers to quickly, easily and correctly identify which products are harmful to health. The clear, simple labels are easily identifiable and understandable regardless of the consumer's age, literacy level, or socioeconomic status. Most importantly, all people and the most vulnerable and marginalised should have access to comprehensible information that allows them to make informed choices about their health. Ultimately, this policy aims to protect this region's greatest asset- our people.

There is growing scientific evidence that octagonal front of package warning labels demonstrates superior efficacy over other fronts of package labelling systems. A study^{ix} conducted by the Ministry

of Health and Wellness of Jamaica, the University of Technology, Jamaica, and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) found that consumers shown octagonal warning labels had a higher chance of correctly identifying products high in sugar, sodium and fats, of correctly identifying the least harmful option out of a selection of products and choosing the least harmful (or none) from a selection of products, when compared to consumers shown the same products with other front of package labelling systems.

FOPWL policy has been backed by scientific evidence and has been identified as a rights-compliant response to NCDs. The former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Dainius Pūras, in 2020 published a supportive [Statement](#) which was endorsed by the current Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and members of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises. This statement highlighted the vulnerability of children to NCDs and the need to ensure an appropriate regulatory environment where children are protected from the marketing and advertising of unhealthy commodities. Additionally that such commodities have clear labelling to allow parents and children to make informed decisions. Indeed, The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) outlines that children have the right to the “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health”, which includes the prevention of malnutrition via the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water (Article 24). FOPWL supports and enables the attainment of this right.

Introduced in Chile in 2016, as part of a comprehensive policy strategy to combat NCDs (which also included restrictions on the sale and marketing of unhealthy foods to children in media and the school environment), research has shown a 24% decrease in purchases of sugary drinks^x. Low and middle-income mothers also indicated that they had gained new knowledge from these labels and their children, informing them that they should not buy products with warning labels^{xi,xii}. This demonstrates that FOPWL is an equitable health policy as it benefits all sectors of society regardless of age or socioeconomic status.

Following its success in Chile, octagonal FOPWL has since been implemented in Peru (2019)^{xiii}, Mexico (2020)^{xiv}, and Uruguay (2020)^{xv}. In Mexico, it has been projected that the octagonal warnings will reduce obesity by 14.7% after five years of implementation and save the country an estimated US\$1.8 billion in obesity costs^{xvi}. The Caribbean region currently has a unique opportunity to implement a policy, which can radically reduce the obesity and NCD burdens and save millions of dollars.

Front of Package Warning Labelling is supported by strong regional mandates, including the [2007 Port of Spain Declaration](#), the [CARPHA 6-Point Policy Package](#) approved by Heads of Government, and the [communiqués of the 37th and 39th Conference of Heads of State and Government](#).

The CPDC joins with a multitude of regional organisations that endorses octagonal front of package warning labels and the FDCRS 5:2010, including the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, the Pan-American Health Organization, the UNICEF Eastern Caribbean office, the Caribbean Association of Nutritionists and Dieticians, the Caribbean Public Health Agency and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States. We believe that this will be an effective and impactful public health policy that will protect the health and future of our Caribbean people.

About CPDC

CPDC is a regional umbrella body of non-governmental organisation for over 30 years and is headquartered in Barbados. CPDC advocates on several economic, social and environmental development issues affecting the region. The Centre also provides technical assistance and small grant support to civil society organisations across the Caribbean.



ⁱ Nardocci M, Leclerc BS, Louzada ML, Monteiro CA, Batal M, Moubarac JC. [Consumption of ultra-processed foods and obesity in Canada](#). *Can J Public Health*. 2019;110(1):4-14.

ⁱⁱ Fiolet T, Srour B, Sellem L, Kesse-Guyot E, Allès B, Méjean C, Deschasaux M, Fassier P, Latino-Martel P, Beslay M, Hercberg S, Lavalette C, Monteiro CA, Julia C, Touvier M. [Consumption of ultra-processed foods and cancer risk: results from NutriNet-Santé prospective cohort](#). *BMJ*. 2018;360:k322.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hall KD, Ayuketah A, Brychta R, Cai H, Cassimatis T, Chen KY, Chung ST, Costa E, Courville A, Darcey V, Fletcher LA et al. [Ultra-Processed Diets Cause Excess Calorie Intake and Weight Gain: An Inpatient Randomized Controlled Trial of Ad Libitum Food Intake](#). *Cell Metabolism*. 2019; 30, 1–11.

^{iv} Srour B, Fezeu LK, Kesse-Guyot E, Allès B et al. [Ultra-processed food intake and risk of cardiovascular disease: prospective cohort study \(NutriNet-Santé\)](#). *BMJ*. 2019;365: | 1451.

^v PAHO/WHO. [Noncommunicable Diseases in the Region of the Americas. Facts and Figures](#). Washington, D.C., United States of America, 2019.

^{vi} WHO/PAHO. [NCDs in the Caribbean](#).

^{vii} PAHO. [Chronic conditions and diseases due to external causes](#).

^{viii} World Health Organization. Regional Office for the Western Pacific. (2020). [Addressing noncommunicable diseases in the COVID-19 response](#). Manila : WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

^{ix} Pan American Health Organization. [Superior efficacy of Front-of-package Warning Labels In Jamaica](#). 2020.

^x Taillie LS, Reyes M, Colchero MA, Popkin BM, Corvalán C. [An evaluation of Chile's Law of Food Labeling and Advertising on sugar-sweetened beverage purchases from 2015 to 2017: a before- and-after study](#). *PLoS Med* 2020; **17**: e1003015.

^{xi} Correa T, Fierro C, Reyes M, Dillman Carpentier FR, Taillie LS, Corvalan C. [Responses to the Chilean law of food labeling and advertising: exploring knowledge, perceptions and behaviors of mothers of young children](#). *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 2019; **16**: 21.

^{xii} Corvalán C, Reyes M, Garmendia ML, Uauy R. [Structural responses to the obesity and non-communicable diseases epidemic: update on the Chilean law of food labelling and advertising](#). *Obes Rev* 2019; **20**: 367–74.

^{xiii} Michail N. [Peru. Nutrition warning labels become mandatory](#). 2019. Food Navigator.

^{xiv} Mexico News Daily. [New warning labels now required on packaged foods](#). 2020.

^{xv} Michail N. [Warning labels set to enter into force in Uruguay. Is your product compliant?](#) 2020. Food Navigator

^{xvi} Basto-Abreu A, Torres-Alvarez R, Reyes-Sánchez F, González-Morales R, Canto-Osorino R, Colchero, MA, et al. [Predicting obesity reduction after implementing warning labels in Mexico: A modeling study](#). *PLOS Medicine*. 2020; 17(7): e1003221.