

**Barbados Childhood Obesity
Prevention Coalition**



OPEN LETTER

***TO THE HONOURABLE MIA AMOR MOTTLEY, Q.C.,
M.P.***

PRIME MINISTER OF BARBADOS

MINISTER OF FINANCE, ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND INVESTMENT

**CONGRATULATIONS ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FUTURE
BARBADOS FRAMEWORK**

August 12, 2021

To the Prime Minister Honourable Mia Amor Mottley,

On this International Youth Day, we write to you as young health advocates representing the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention (BCOP) Coalition Youth Subcommittee (for which the Heart and Stroke Foundation Barbados functions as the official Secretariat) and Healthy Caribbean Youth (HCY), the youth arm of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, to commend you, Madame Prime Minister, on the announcement of the Future Barbados Framework at the Naming Ceremony of the CARICOM Building at the University of the West Indies, in honour of the late Professor Owen Arthur, last month. We were pleased to hear of this ambitious 5-year plan which aims to put regional youth at the forefront of various issues, of which a 50% reduction in childhood obesity is included. As ardent youth advocates in this space we are pleased to see that meaningful youth engagement and childhood obesity prevention are among the priorities in planning for the future of Barbados.

Both of our organisations utilise the power of youth and civil society to agitate for the adoption of a suite of best-practice, evidence-based policies that support the reduction of childhood obesity, namely:

- Mandatory front-of-package octagonal warning labelling,
- Restrictions on the sale and marketing of unhealthy products in and around schools and,
- The taxation of sweet beverages of at least 20%.

This is alongside other recommendations such as encouraging physical activity and providing free drinking water in schools and enacting legislation related to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes to preserve infant and child feeding.

We push for healthier environments for all, especially children and young people whose voices are often silenced or ignored. At the core of our work is the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, which outlines:

- The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions which affect children. (Article 3)
- Every child has the right to express their views and have them be taken seriously. (Article 12)
- Children have the right to the highest attainable quality of health. (Article 24)

As such, all CARICOM Member States signatories have pledged to demonstrate their commitment to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights, including their right to health, adequate nutrition and mental health support.

This year's theme for International Youth Day - "Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovations for Human and Planetary Health", is particularly pertinent in amplifying the message that the success of this global effort to change the way we eat will not be achieved without the meaningful participation of young people.

An alarming 1 in 3 children in the Caribbean region is living with overweight or obesity which can lead to increases in childhood hypertension, anxiety, depression and the development of non-communicable diseases in both childhood and adulthood. It is quite fitting that this announcement of the 'Future Barbados Framework was made at the Owen Arthur CARICOM Research Complex, as the late Prime Minister was a man who strongly believed that "he who has health, has hope; and he who has hope, has everything". Notably during his chairmanship of CARICOM from 1 July 2007 to 31 December 2007, he oversaw the CARICOM Heads of State and Government Regional Summit on Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases and was one of the signatories of the landmark 2007 Port-of-Spain Declaration, uniting to stop the epidemic of chronic NCDs. We are pleased to see that this legacy continues.

We salute the Government's commitment to put youth at the center of the country's growth and development and to deliver on your duty to protect young people's health and well-being. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, bold actions such as the development of the National School Nutrition Policy and this subsequent Framework are essential to the health of our nation's future.

We look forward to the Nutrition Policy being approved by Cabinet in time for the start of the September 2021 school term. This rights-focused, people centered and policy-based approach that

guides our work will be central to all childhood obesity prevention related policies and activities in the future.

As we commemorate International Youth Day, we commit to supporting the implementation of the Future Barbados Framework and look forward to seeing youth take charge of issues that we know will pave the way for a healthier, stronger and more resilient Barbados.

Signed,

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