



Media Release

“Towards a smoke – free Caribbean”

PAHO/WHO, HCC, UWI and CPHLF launch policy briefs to support Caribbean Countries in implementing smoke-free legislation

Bridgetown, Barbados, 30th May, 2022 (PAHO/WHO) - “Can you join me as I imagine what the Smoke Free Caribbean in 2025/2030 would be like?” Dr. Joy St. John, Executive Director, Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) asked webinar attendees at this year’s ‘World No Tobacco Day’ virtual celebrations, held on Monday May 30th, 2022. “As tobacco use alone accounts for 1 in 6 of all deaths resulting from NCDs, all of those people will be alive with their finances greatly improved from not buying 5 to 10 packs of cigarettes every day!” she continued. “The Environment will also be less polluted by cigarette butts and discarded packaging - the air will be fresher too.” Dr. St. John remarked.

The webinar, entitled ‘A Smoke-Free Caribbean: A Win/Win for Health and the Environment’ was jointly hosted by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC), the Caribbean Public Health Law Forum (CPHLF) and the University of the West Indies (UWI) Cave Hill Law and Health Research Unit (LHRU) in observance of World No Tobacco Day 2022. This year’s theme aimed to bring into focus yet another threat to public health caused by tobacco consumption – that is, environmental degradation.

Subregional Programme Director, PAHO/WHO, Mr. Dean Chambliss explained that a focus on the ecological impacts of cigarette smoking is “...of grave importance because each year close to 600 million trees are cut down to make 6 trillion cigarettes, contributing significantly to deforestation on a global level.” He added that addressing tobacco’s threat to environmental sustainability. “It is also important because 32 million tons of tobacco leaves are grown to produce those same cigarettes, and studies show us that this results in over 80 million tons of carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere annually,” Mr Chambliss underlined.

The overall aim of the webinar was to support CARICOM countries in achieving the goal of A 100% Smoke-Free-Caribbean by 2022. According to Mr. Dean Chambliss, in September 2017, Caribbean Ministers of Health endorsed the PAHO Strategy and Plan of Action to Strengthen Tobacco Control in the Region of the Americas 2018-2022. Furthermore, In 2018, CARICOM Heads of Government supported the use of the tagline “CARICOM: A Region free of Tobacco Smoke by 2022”, during the 38th Regular Meeting of the Conference of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community. Later the same year, the Heads renewed the region's commitment to ‘establishing and maintaining a smoke-free status’.

Though most CARICOM Member States are signatory to the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the implementation of effective tobacco control measures in the region has unfortunately lagged. The webinar specifically set out to outline the benefits of smoke-free policies to the environment, encourage CARICOM countries to action their commitment to the implementation of smoke-free policies, and to launch six (6) publications (case studies and policy briefs)

developed jointly by the HCC, PAHO and the UWI LHRU as part of the PAHO/HCC 2021 Letter of Agreement under the title: ***'Accelerating progress towards a 100% Smoke-Free Caribbean by 2022.'***

Technical Advisor on Tobacco Control for the Americas, International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, Mr. Jorge V. Cardenas, explained that these publications were made possible with the support and funding by the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use, under a grant managed by the International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. Mr. Cardenas went on to remark that "We (The Union) are very glad to have been part of the efforts that will be presented today - For us, the Caribbean is a key region in tobacco control and therefore, recently we have been supporting the tobacco control agenda in the Caribbean under a couple of grants."

According to Sir Trevor Hassell, President, Healthy Caribbean Coalition, the publications are "... but a continuation of the HCC's tobacco control efforts and a contribution to the acceleration of member state action towards a smoke-free Caribbean." Sir. Hassell concluded his remarks by expressing his hope that the publications will be useful tools for Caribbean governments and tobacco control civil society advocates.

"I take this opportunity to remind member states of our commitment In September 2017, when our Ministers of Health endorsed the PAHO Strategy and Plan of Action to Strengthen Tobacco Control in the Region of the Americas 2018-2022. Our ultimate goal is for a 100% smoke-free environment throughout the Americas by – NO not the next ten years, but this year- 2022!" Dr. Karen Gordon Boyle, Programme Manager Health Sector Development Unit, CARICOM Secretariat urged.

The webinar featured presentations on the state of the Caribbean regarding smoke-free legislation by Consultant, NCDs and Mental Health, PAHO/WHO Subregional Programme, Ms. Sheryl Dennis – Wright, as well as a global overview on smoke-free legislation by Senior Legal Advisor, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (CTFK), Mr Daniel Lopez. Deputy Dean, Faculty of Law and Health Research Unit, UWI, Ms. Nicole Foster, led a presentation that provided an overview into each of the six publications launched which she had authored, and Ms. Joanna Joseph-Henry, Tobacco Control Focal Point, Ministry of Health and Wellness St. Lucia, outlined the implementation experiences of St. Lucia's smoke-free legislation.

The webinar concluded with a panel discussion on achieving a smoke-free Caribbean, moderated by Ms. Barbara McGaw, Tobacco Control Policy Advisor for HCC and the Jamaica Coalition for Tobacco Control (JTC). Panelists included Dr. James Hospedales, Founder and Managing Director EarthMedic/Earth Nurse, Ms. Dorial Quintyne, Youth Tobacco Activist, Healthy Caribbean Youth (HCY), Ms. Enuetta Bird, Member of the Antigua and Barbuda Tobacco Free Initiative and Ms. Nicole Foster.

The recording of this webinar, complete with presentation materials are available via the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC).

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