TOWARDS A '100% SMOKE-FREE CARIBBEAN' WHAT MINISTRIES OF FINANCE NEED TO KNOW



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KEY MESSAGES

Tobacco costs the global economy US$ 1.4 trillion per annum.[1]

In the Americas, smoking attributable diseases are responsible for 6.7% of total health expenditures and represent a total economic cost of approximately 2.4% of GDP.[2]

Tobacco control is not simply a health issue but also a sustainable development issue, as reflected in SDG Target 3.4.

Tobacco exposure disproportionately affects the more vulnerable in society and increases existing inequities, while tobacco control benefits the poor disproportionately.

Elimination of exposure to second-hand smoke is a cost-effective WHO 'Best Buy' for the reduction of tobacco use.

Article 8 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) requires State Parties to provide effective protection from public and workplace exposure to tobacco smoke. This can only be achieved through comprehensive smoke-free environments.

Only 7 of the 14 CARICOM FCTC State Parties have implemented smoke-free environments and the region is far behind the target set by Caribbean Ministers of Health in 2017 of attaining a 100% smoke-free Caribbean by 2022.[3]

Industry interference is a major challenge and must be guarded against. Ministries of Finance must refrain from partnering with the tobacco industry. Decisions must be based on evidence that is free from conflict of interest.

THE URGENT NEED FOR A '100% SMOKE-FREE CARIBBEAN'

The Caribbean sub-region is trailing the rest of the Americas in implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), including in the area of smoke-free environments.

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, including 100% smoke-free environments throughout the Americas by 2022. In the same year CARICOM Heads of Government supported the use of tagline ***"CARICOM: A Region Free of Tobacco Smoke by 2022"***; and in 2018 Heads renewed the region's commitment to '*establishing and maintaining a smoke free status*'.

Currently, of the 14 CARICOM States that are FCTC State Parties, only 7 (Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, St Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago) have implemented 100% smoke-free environments.[4] This is particularly troubling, bearing in mind the existence of strong regional and sub-regional mandates on this issue, and the fact that the FCTC Article 8 obligations are time-sensitive and their expected implementation period has long passed.

Implementation of smoke-free environments will significantly benefit Caribbean economies by reducing the socio-economic burden caused by the region's high rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and NCD mortality.

The Caribbean has the Americas' highest rates of NCD mortality, a fact which has potentially catastrophic effects for most Caribbean small economies if not reversed.[5] The region's NCD prevalence rate also has significant direct and indirect economic costs in the form of cost of treatment, work-absenteeism due to illness, lower employee productivity, etc.

Implementation of smoke-free environments in the Caribbean would have health benefits for smokers and non-smokers, such as improved air quality, discouraging initiation of smoking, and increased smoking cessation rates. It would also reduce the costs associated with NCD treatment. This would ultimately improve national economic performance.

THE FINANCE SECTOR AND SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENTS

The economic burden caused by the region's current NCD prevalence rate demands urgent intervention to significantly reduce NCD risk factors such as tobacco consumption and exposure.

The picture of the region's high rates of NCD mortality, coupled with health care and social security systems dealing with a significant elderly population with NCDs, paints a bleak picture for the region's future.[5]

NCDs impose significant burdens on the national economy, as persons living with NCDs are more likely to exit the labour force and have lower productivity at work and greater work absenteeism. There are also the significant direct costs to government and the health care system related to the provision of treatment for NCDs. The Barbados NCD Investment Case Study estimated that Barbados was losing BBD $145 per annum due to missed workdays, low productivity, reduced workforce participation and the cost to business of replacing workers just from cardiovascular disease and diabetes alone. These costs represented around 2.6% of projected GDP for 2015.[6] Equally, the Jamaica NCD Investment Case Study estimated that over the period 2017 – 2032, scaling up the recommended package of NCD interventions would, at minimum, save over 5,700 lives and restore over 67,400 healthy life years; avoid labour productivity losses of over JMD 47.3 billion; save over JMD 29.8 billion in direct medical costs to treat diseases and grow GDP by an extra 0.11 percentage points by year five.[7] The overall return for investing in implementing the prevention and control interventions examined in the investment case in Jamaica is JMD 2.1. This means, for every JMD invested in implementing interventions for NCD prevention and control, there will be a JMD 2.1 return. The study also showed that tobacco control interventions will secure the highest return on investments.

The economic fallout associated with the region's high NCD prevalence and mortality rates is being magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic, as persons with NCDs tend to have worse health outcomes than others in the population.[5] Inaction is no longer an option – urgent, evidence-based, effective action is needed now.

Tobacco control is not simply a health issue, but, a sustainable development one.

Available evidence indicates that smoke-free environments contribute to more than solving just the public health burden that accompanies the tobacco epidemic. Their roles in denormalizing smoking behavior have subsequent impacts on the various social determinants of health where implementation of this measure is highly correlated with successful cessation quit attempts in tobacco users. This consequential decrease in tobacco consumption will ultimately see more disposable income available for families to improve their way of living by being able to provide proper nourishment, education, and even housing. Long term, this translates into improved health outcomes for past users as well as those who have been exposed to secondhand smoking, which increases personal productivity, a key factor in improving economic situations in countries.

Implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is one of the targets for achievement of Sustainable Development (SDG) Goal 3 (health and well-being). On smoke-free environments, FCTC Article 8 specifically requires State Parties to provide effective protection from public and workplace exposure to tobacco smoke. Since there is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke, this can only be achieved by 100% smoke-free environments. Tobacco control, including smoke-free environments is also connected to other SDGs such as SDG 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere), SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), SDG 10 (reduce inequality within and among countries); SDG 12 (ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns); and SDG 17 (strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development).

Implementation of smoke-free environments benefits the poor and vulnerable in society.

The poor and vulnerable tend to be the principal smokers within a given population and therefore tend to experience associated negative health and economic effects disproportionately, further reinforcing the poverty cycle.[8] Accordingly, efforts to control tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke tend to disproportionately benefit these individuals both in health and economic terms, due to the reduction or even cessation of their smoking habit as a result of implementation of measures such as smoke-free environments.

Implementation of smoke-free environments does not have negative economic impacts on businesses such as bars and restaurants.

Countries often face opposition to implementation of smoke-free environments based on anticipated fall out in the business sector such as bars and restaurants within the hospitality sector. However, the evidence from a range of conflict of interest free studies, clearly illustrates that this is far from the truth. In fact, implementation of smoke-free environments in the workplace may actually create cost savings for the businesses concerned through deceased absenteeism, increased employee productivity, reduced cleaning, maintenance and insurance costs etc.[8]

Implementation of smoke-free environments does not negatively impact employment.

Overall studies free from conflict of interest demonstrated that in the majority of countries tobacco control measures are employment neutral. While this may not the case for countries which are heavily dependent on tobacco exports, any decline here would tend to be gradual, allowing sufficient time for the necessary adjustments to be made.[8]

Elimination of exposure to second-hand smoke is a cost-effective measure.

Elimination of exposure to second-hand smoke is one of 5 WHO 'Best Buys' for tobacco control .i.e. it is one of the interventions judged to be "the most cost-effective and feasible for implementation." These measures have an average cost-effectiveness ratio of ≤I$100/DALY (Disability-Adjusted Life Year) averted in low-and lower middle-income countries.

Measures to address illicit trade in tobacco products can make a positive contribution to effective implementation of smoke-free environments.

Actions by Ministries of Finance to address illicit trade in tobacco products can ultimately help reduce supply and demand for tobacco. This will in turn positively impact implementation of smoke-free initiatives. Illicit trade in tobacco products is also responsible for significant losses in government revenues and contributes to funding of international criminal activities. While the tobacco industry (through

ignoring general customs and border protection issues) often erroneously purports that taxation of tobacco products fuels illicit trade, evidence has shown that the most direct and effective method for reducing tobacco consumption is to increase the price of tobacco products through taxation. Illicit trade can therefore be controlled by strong tax administration, thereby reducing supply and the positively impacting on smoke-free environments.

Industry interference is a major challenge and must be guarded against. Ministries of Finance must refrain from partnering with the tobacco industry. Decisions must be based on evidence that is free from conflict of interest.

Industry interference remains one of the major obstacles to implementation of effective tobacco control measures such as smoke-free environments. This has taken various forms, including trying to discredit the science behind these measures, promoting false claims about their economic impact, and generally trying to delay, dilute or derail the implementation of tobacco control policies. More recently, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry further sought to convey its interest in public health by embarking on developing vaccines, making donations of health equipment, supplies and cash, enticing youths through scholarships, and capitalizing on promoting their newer products as cessation tools.

The FCTC Article 5.3 obliges State Parties to protect their tobacco control public health policies (which include smoke-free environments) from the tobacco industry's 'commercial and other vested interests'. It is important that governments guard against and counter such interference by, inter alia, ensuring that their policy decisions are based on evidence that is free from conflict of interest, and by protecting public health tobacco control policymaking from 'the commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry and those who work for them'.[9] Further and within the context of this brief, Ministries of Finance must refrain from partnering with the tobacco industry.on tobacco use continues to emphasize that there is no safe level of consumption, and State Parties to the FCTC in particular must honour their commitments to protect their populations from the harms of tobacco use transparently.

About this Policy Brief:

This Policy Brief is part of a series of four (4) sectoral policy briefs addressing smoke free environments and ministries of finance, education, the blue economy and tourism. The aim of the series is to facilitate effective engagement between health and other sectors which play an important role in relation to the development and implementation of smoke-free environment provisions, in line with Article 8 of the WHO FCTC.



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WHAT MINISTRIES OF THE BLUE ECONOMY NEED TO KNOW



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WHAT MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION NEED TO KNOW



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WHAT MINISTRIES OF FINANCE NEED TO KNOW



TOWARDS A '100% SMOKE-FREE CARIBBEAN'
WHAT MINISTRIES OF TOURISM NEED TO KNOW

End Notes

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