



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



MAY 2022



## KEY MESSAGES

Smoke-free environments are a key component of sustainable tourism.

Smoke-free environments are good for tourism - they protect tourism workers and guests from the health risks associated with tobacco consumption and exposure.

Overall, smoke-free environments do not have negative economic effects on the hospitality industry.

There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke. Tourism workers are often on the front-line of exposure to second-hand smoke.<sup>1</sup>

Smoke-free environments protect against ecological degradation of the marine environment from cigarette butts.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

Industry interference is a major challenge and must be guarded against. Ministries of Tourism 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 TOURISM SECTOR AND SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENTS



### **Smoke-free environments are a key component of sustainable tourism.**

Sustainable tourism is defined by the UN Environment Programme and UN World Tourism Organization as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”<sup>6</sup> Sustainable tourism is dependent, in part, on the health of residents, tourists and the environment. Tobacco smoke consumption and exposure not only adversely affect the health and well-being of residents and tourists, but they can also contribute to the degradation of heritage sites. For example, in 2012 Cambodia designated Angkor Wat, a UNESCO World Heritage site, as a smoke-free environment in recognition of the damage tobacco smoke can cause to heritage sites.<sup>7</sup>

As some of the most heavily tourism-dependent countries globally, Caribbean states have a significant vested interest in ensuring the sustainability of their tourism product by implementing smoke-free environments.

### **Tobacco use is harmful to the environment, and hence a threat to a core component of the Caribbean tourism product.**

Cigarette butts are a major contributor to marine pollution.<sup>8</sup> More generally, tobacco waste contains over “7,000 toxic chemicals that pollute not just air - with tons of carcinogenic, greenhouse effect-causing gases - but also land, sea and waterways.”<sup>9</sup>

### **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 fallout in the business sector, such as from 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 workplaces may actually create cost savings for the businesses concerned through decreased absenteeism, increased employee productivity, and reduced cleaning, maintenance and insurance costs, etc.<sup>10</sup> Many guests also prefer a smoke-free hotel environment.

Recent literature demonstrates that even in regions with relatively high smoking rates, pro-smoking societal attitudes and weak social norms against tobacco control, smoke-free legislation does not impact negatively on hospitality industry revenues and, if anything, may lead to a small increase.<sup>11</sup>

Implementation of smoke-free environments does not negatively impact employment. Overall, studies free from conflict of interest demonstrated that in most countries tobacco control measures are employment neutral. While this is not the case for countries which are heavily dependent on tobacco exports, any decline in those countries would tend to be gradual, allowing sufficient time for the necessary adjustments to be made.<sup>10</sup>

Smoke-free environments also have the additional benefit of protecting their workers from second-hand smoke.

### **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 ≤\$100/DALY (Disability-Adjusted Life Year) averted in low-and lower middle-income countries.

### **Tourism is one of the largest labour markets in the Caribbean and tourism workers are often on the front-line of exposure to second-hand smoke.**

Scientific evidence is clear that there is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, workers’ exposure to second-hand smoke is an occupational hazard which must be protected against.<sup>13</sup> Smoke-free environments offer smokers and non-smokers a number of health benefits, such as improved air quality, discouraging initiation of smoking, and increased successful quit attempts. The region’s high rates of NCD mortality and the significant burden NCDs impose on national health-care systems also have potentially serious implications for the tourism labour market.<sup>5</sup>

**Industry interference is a major challenge and must be guarded against. Ministries of Tourism 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.

Further, tourism has been identified as ‘a significant source of resistance to increased tobacco regulation in Caribbean territories’ with tobacco control measures being ‘frequently framed as potentially detrimental to tourism’.<sup>14</sup>

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’.<sup>15</sup> Further and within the context of this brief, Ministries of Tourism more generally must refrain from partnering with the tobacco industry, including with respect to the grant of scholarships or other tobacco industry-driven partnerships and collaborations.

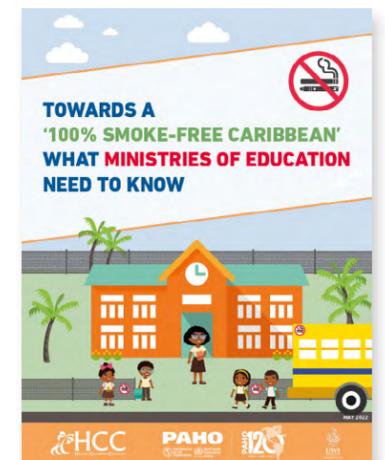


**About this Policy Brief:**

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.



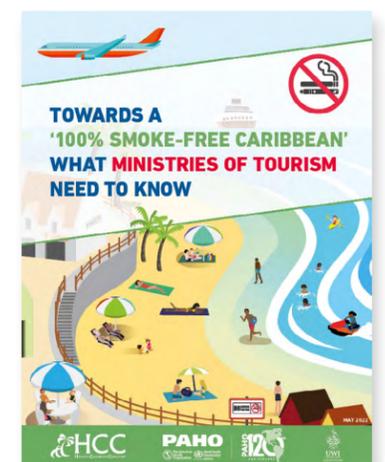
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WHAT MINISTRIES OF THE BLUE ECONOMY NEED TO KNOW



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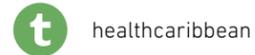


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## End Notes

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