



TOWARDS A '100% SMOKE-FREE CARIBBEAN' WHAT MINISTRIES OF THE BLUE ECONOMY NEED TO KNOW



MAY 2022

 KEY MESSAGES

- Smoke-free environments is not simply a health issue, but also a sustainable development one - it contributes to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources (SDG 14).¹
- Smoke-free environments reduce pollution, toxicity and micro-plastic contamination in the marine environment and help promote healthier marine life.²
- Cigarette butts and filters are the most littered item on earth. Of an estimated 5.3 trillion cigarettes smoked annually, two thirds (4.5 trillion) are improperly disposed of, including on beaches.²
- Smoke-free environments help protect workers within the blue economy, especially those who are poor and otherwise vulnerable, from the effects of tobacco consumption and exposure.
- 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 the Blue Economy 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.³ 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.⁴ 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 BLUE ECONOMY AND SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENTS



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

Tobacco control is not simply a health issue but also a sustainable development issue – it contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development (SDG) 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources. In addition, implementation of the FCTC is one of the targets for achievement of SDG 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.

Implementation of smoke-free environments helps reduce marine pollution, toxicity and micro-plastic contamination, resulting in healthier oceans and healthier marine life.

Cigarette butts account for 30-40% of all litter found in coastal and urban litter clean-ups.² They are made up of harmful chemicals, including arsenic, heavy metals, and nicotine, which leach into the environment, adversely affecting the health of marine organisms and posing a direct ecological threat to mangroves and coral-reef ecosystems. Cigarette butts are also routinely found in the intestines of seabirds, sea turtles, fish and dolphins.

Implementation of smoke-free environments protects the poor and vulnerable fisherfolk and associated communities from the harms of tobacco consumption and exposure.

The fishing industry in the Caribbean is typically small-scale, involving informal and often unregistered labourers with limited access to social safety-nets in case of medical emergencies. These workers are among some of the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society, with lower incomes and lower access to social protection. Poverty and vulnerability are significantly correlated with smoking, resulting in individuals who are least capable of withstanding the negative health and economic impacts of smoking being exposed to its effects, further reinforcing the poverty cycle.⁵ Accordingly, efforts to control tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke, such as implementation of smoke-free environments, tend to

disproportionately benefit these individuals both in health and economic terms due to the reduction or even cessation of their smoking habit.

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.

Industry interference is a major challenge and must be guarded against. Ministries of the Blue Economy 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'.⁶ Further and within the context of this brief, Ministries of the Blue Economy and schools more generally must refrain from partnering with the tobacco industry.



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



TOWARDS A '100% SMOKE-FREE CARIBBEAN'
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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