Background

On April 5th and 6th 2022, the Caribbean Institute for Health Research (CAIHR) and the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) collaborated on the inaugural Virtual Caribbean Healthy Food Policy Research Symposium. The Symposium aimed to highlight ground-breaking research being conducted by regional professionals related to the following subject areas of keen interest to HCC and their partners:

- Taxation of unhealthy foods/subsidies of healthy foods
- Mandatory Front-of-Package Warning Labels
- Nutrition Labelling
- Enacting legislation related to The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes
- Effects of marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children
- Impact of the sale and marketing of unhealthy foods in schools

The Symposium had the following objectives:

1. To showcase Caribbean healthy food/healthy food policy research and researchers.
2. To explore opportunities and mechanisms to strengthen networks and partnerships between healthy food/healthy food policy researchers and regional advocates.
3. To explore emerging research areas that support and advance healthy food policy advocacy, policies and programmes.
4. To discuss strategies needed to build capacity in research areas linked to healthy food policies and programmes.
5. To develop a Healthy Food Policy Research Agenda to support and advance healthy food policy advocacy, policies and programmes.

The Symposium had the following outcomes:

1. Caribbean healthy food/healthy food policy research shared with researchers, advocates, policymakers and other key stakeholders.
2. Networks between researchers, advocates and other key stakeholders established or strengthened.
3. Initiation of a database of regional healthy food policy research/researchers and advocates
4. Healthy Food Policy Research Agenda developed capturing priority research areas, capacity needs and strategies to build research capacity.
Fulfilling the final outcome, the Healthy Food Policy Research Agenda developed during the symposium is presented below.

Objective
- To foster Caribbean research which supports and advances healthy food policy advocacy, policies and programmes.

Timeline
2022-2024

Challenges in executing research to-date:
- Data gaps
- Siloed research
- Limited research capacity
- Limited funding

Revised approaches to future research:
- Co-development of research agendas to facilitate synthesis of ongoing and planned research
- Translational Research
- Interoperable data capture

Successes and opportunities that can be leveraged to expand Caribbean-based research:
- Rich existing research in the areas of nutrition, food science, agriculture and food policy.
- Funding opportunities from regional and global agencies.
- Fellowship opportunities from regional and international agencies to support and build the capacity of young researchers
- Collaborations with colleagues outside of the region which facilitate capacity-building opportunities
- Increasing emphasis on translating research to practice

Priority Research topics:
- Priority ‘healthy food’ needs per country
- Salt consumption and salt composition of commonly consumed packaged and restaurant foods
- Feasibility of different sweetened beverage (SSB) taxation structures
- Marketing of unhealthy foods to children
- Legal environment surrounding food policy

Next steps (CAIHR and HCC):
- Create a database of Caribbean healthy food policy research and researchers.
- Create an informal network of healthy food policy researchers, graduate students, advocates and partners.

- Identify opportunities to showcase healthy food policy research.
- Explore the possibility of hosting a second healthy food policy research symposium in 2023.
- Where possible, support the execution of research focusing on the priority research areas identified in this agenda.