



PRESS RELEASE

“Clearing the Air”

HCC and PAHO launch new report urging policymakers to tackle youth vaping in the Caribbean

Bridgetown, Barbados, 15th June 2023 - "We need to protect our youth", implored Mrs. Barbara McGaw, Tobacco Control Policy Advisor for Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) and the Jamaica Coalition for Tobacco Control (JCTC). Mrs. McGaw's call to action addressed the concern around vaping among adolescents in the Caribbean region, which was the key topic of the HCC and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) webinar, "Clearing the Air - Vaping and Youth in The Caribbean" held on Friday June 9th, 2023. She maintained that “banning tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship - that is where we really need to go”, in protecting the region’s youth from vaping.

The recent webinar launched HCC’s new report, “Vaping Among Adolescents and Youth in The Caribbean: Situation, Policy Responses, and Recommended Actions”. Mrs. Maisha Hutton, Executive Director of the HCC, noted that “This timely report, developed by HCC with inputs from a wide cross section of regional and global stakeholders and funded by PAHO, summarises the situation regarding the use of electronic nicotine delivery systems and electronic non-nicotine delivery systems (ENDS/ENNDS) among Caribbean adolescents and youth and associated policy responses.” The report highlighted that among individuals aged 13 to 15 years in the 35 PAHO Member States, the highest prevalence of current tobacco use (25.3%) was reported in the Caribbean, noting that ENDS/ENNDS use is also widespread and on the increase in the Caribbean. The report, launched in recognition of World No tobacco Day 2023, also makes recommendations to CARICOM governments—and their key partners and stakeholders—for priority actions to prevent and reduce ENDS/ENNDS use and harms among young people in the Caribbean.

Panellists emphasised the urgency of taking action to combat youth vaping given its high prevalence use among adolescents in the Caribbean. Vaping, defined as the inhalation and exhalation of vapour created by an electronic device, which heats a liquid containing nicotine, flavourings, and chemicals, poses significant risks. Ms. Sheryl Dennis-Wright, International Consultant on NCDs and Mental Health at PAHO/WHO Office of Subregional Program Coordination for the Caribbean, highlighted the risks associated with dual smoking and the alarming statistic that e-cigarette users have a 30% chance of initiating cigarette smoking.

Senior Legal Advisor at the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (CTFK), Mr. Daniel Lopez, similarly expressed deep concern over the alarming number of young people worldwide using cigarettes and the potential for e-cigarettes to serve as an entryway to nicotine addiction and conventional cigarette use. He highlighted the worrisome role of flavoured products in enticing youth and emphasised the urgency of comprehensive regulation to address aggressive marketing tactics and social media influence.

Ms. Dorial Quintyne, a Healthy Caribbean Youth (HCY) Member and Youth Tobacco Control Advocate, drew attention to the targeted marketing strategies employed by the tobacco and vaping industry. She stressed the “urgent need for comprehensive regulation, addressing aggressive marketing tactics, social media influence, and gaps in the regulation that contribute to the accessibility and the attractiveness of vaping.”

The webinar also showcased the "Take a Breath - Can't Fool Me" campaign spearheaded by the Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society (TTCS) with support from the Scotiabank Foundation, which aims to raise awareness about the dangers of smoking and vaping among youth. Dr. Asante LeBlanc, President of the TTCS, underscored the campaign's objectives of empowering young people to make informed decisions, supporting their efforts to quit smoking and vaping, and advocating for stronger regulations on smoking and vaping products.

CARICOM countries, most of which have ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, are therefore urged to take swift action to implement regulatory measures to prohibit or restrict the manufacture, import, distribution, presentation, sale, and use of the vaping products, and to ensure that where tobacco control legislative provisions are already in place, but do not effectively address novel products, these laws are updated. Similarly, where no legislative measures are in place, countries are urged to take the relevant steps to ensure that new and emerging products including ENDS/ENNDS are adequately regulated from the outset.

The newly released report, now available on the HCC's website, provides policymakers and key stakeholders with valuable insights including regional youth vaping data, policy responses and evidence-based recommendations to prevent and reduce vaping among young people.

The recording of this webinar and accompanying report can be found [here](#).

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Healthy Caribbean Coalition is the only regional NCD alliance of health and non-health civil society organisations. HCC, with over 100 members, works closely with regional and international leaders in NCD prevention and control to leverage the power of civil society by strengthening and supporting its membership in the implementation of programmes aimed at reducing the morbidity and mortality associated with NCDs.

The **Pan American Health Organization** (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.

The **PAHO Subregional Program** is responsible for providing subregional technical cooperation and to strengthen PAHO's engagement with the Caribbean Subregional integration mechanisms, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and its various bodies and organs; and to build synergistic partnerships with the subregional institutions such as the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and the University of the West Indies (UWI), among others. PAHO's subregional technical cooperation specifically focuses on public health issues which would benefit from economies of scale and for which agreement on proposed collective responses and actions would produce a far greater impact rather than

individual country responses. The Subregional Program also plays a role in coordinating among the different PAHO country offices.

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