



HCC AND PARTNERS LAUNCH “SEE THE TRUTH” CAMPAIGN

BRIDGETOWN BARBADOS, 24th JANUARY 2024 - The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) along with partners, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB), the Heart Foundation of Jamaica (HFJ) and the Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network (JYAN), have launched “**See the Truth**”, a regional social media campaign to advocate for healthy food policies, like the front of package octagonal warning label (FOPWL), while building support for the implementation of measures to safeguard policymaking processes by highlighting industry interference tactics deployed during the front-of-package labelling decision-making process.

The campaign builds on past advocacy campaigns [Make it Make Sense](#) and [People Over Profit](#) campaigns, that aimed to build support for evidence-informed healthy food policies while highlighting the challenges of conflicts of interest and industry interference to policy development.

The Caribbean, like much of the world, is facing a health crisis fuelled by a rise in unhealthy diets with an excess of ultra-processed food products high in sodium, sugars, saturated fats and other additives. This diet is the leading risk factor for obesity and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension and some cancers. Policies such as FOPWL, specifically the octagonal warning labels, are needed to change our food environment to make the healthy choice, the easy choice. Many Caribbean countries have not implemented these policies despite endorsement by the World Health Organization/Pan American Health Organization (WHO/PAHO), the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and local Ministries of Health. This is in part due to some food and beverage industry actors, who advance that they will lose profits with the introduction of this regulation, attempting to delay, dilute and derail healthy food policies. Industry interference and opposition to health policies like the octagonal warning label is delaying the Caribbean’s potential to achieve a healthier food environment, and by extension a healthier population.

‘The See the Truth campaign highlights some of the tactics deployed by private sector organisations across the region to undermine the CARICOM front-of-package labelling standards approval process and ultimately prevent the introduction of octagonal warning labels on pre-packaged foods,’ as described by Sir Trevor Hassell, President of the HCC. “Data from countries with these labels shows that consumer purchases of ‘high-in’ products dropped dramatically by 24% after the introduction of the octagonal warnings leading to improved consumer diets. Fears of impact on sales is leading to industry push back all over



the world - not just in the Caribbean - but these policies can have a positive impact for food companies through reformulation and product expansion to healthier options.”

The campaign explores the diverse strategies used by the private sector to undermine healthy policies, such as building favour with segments of the public, including children. Shannique Bowden, lawyer and Executive Director of the JYAN, explained: *“The See the Truth campaign highlights the targeting of young people through corporate social responsibility actions like donations and sponsorships. Marketing of unhealthy products to children in all of its forms is predatory, violates child rights principles and impacts children's ability to make informed choices. These powerful tactics expand brand visibility and deepen loyalty in the most vulnerable populations - our children and the disadvantaged - while positioning the industry as invaluable community actors. See the Truth. Our children deserve better.”*

The campaign not only attempts to build public awareness about the actions being taken by the ultra-processed food and beverage sector to weaken food policy and preserve profits – but it also addresses the role of governments in protecting decision-making processes from the undue influence of the private sector with vested interests. Ms. Barbara McGaw, Programme Manager at the HFJ underscored the importance of good governance systems in the FOPWL consultations in Jamaica, *“The HFJ has been very vocal in the local media raising concerns about transparency and accountability in the national standards voting process in Jamaica in 2021 and more recently in 2023. Public health decision-making processes must be fair and balanced in order to ensure all stakeholders have a voice and voting is not skewed in the favour of those who benefit financially in the absence of regulation. The ‘See the Truth’ campaign calls on governments to say no to industry interference by instituting measures which support the establishment and enforcement of transparent and accountable governance systems.”*

Mrs. Greta Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer of the HSFB, sees the campaign as a much needed educational and advocacy tool and emphasized that while the campaign highlights the interference of the private sector, it is with the end goal of moving the private sector towards helping rather than hindering efforts to promote effective health policies and healthy lifestyles among our vulnerable population. Mrs Yearwood stressed, *“We are small societies, and we need to work together to guard against policy interference in order to protect our health especially the health of our children. The private sector, especially health- supporting companies, have an important role to play in creating healthy food environments through supporting and promoting policies like the octagonal warning label and the Barbados School Nutrition Policy and through the donations of healthy products and healthy initiatives. This also represents a powerful business opportunity to meet the growing demand for innovative healthy products.”*

“**See the Truth**” calls on the general public and policymakers to acknowledge the realities behind industry interference and the harm it causes as a barrier to effective policy development and implementation. It also appeals to those in the industry who have been working against the octagonal warning labels and other food policies to take a closer look at their actions and motives, and the impact they have on their societies and nations at large.

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About the Partners:

[Healthy Caribbean Coalition](#)

The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) was informally established in 2008, arising out of the 2007 Declaration of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The HCC was then officially registered as a not-for-profit organisation in 2012. The HCC is the only Caribbean NCD alliance of over 100 health and non-health civil society organisations (CSOs). The HCC 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.

[Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados](#)

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados Inc. is a non-profit organization registered under the Companies Act 1982 of Barbados registration number 269 and under the Charities Act 1979-2 registration number 82. The Heart and Stroke Foundation started management of the Childhood Obesity Programme in 2018, with the current team starting in 2019. The team from 2019 to 2024 has been instrumental in developing the Barbados Childhood Obesity Coalition, which is a local advocacy group with a collection of close to 30 civil society organisations and concerned individuals who are working to sensitize children, policymakers, parents, teachers and schools about the high incidence of Childhood Obesity in Barbados and the level of NCDs occurring in our children. . Its Childhood Obesity Prevention (COP) Programme supports obesity prevention through mass media campaigns for increased awareness of the harms of sugary drinks and promotion of policy change.

[Heart Foundation Jamaica](#)

About the Heart Foundation of Jamaica

The Heart Foundation of Jamaica (HFJ) was formed, as a non-governmental organization (NGO) by the Lions Club of Kingston, in 1971. The Foundation is a member of the InterAmerican Heart Foundation, the Framework Convention Alliance, the Healthy Caribbean Coalition and the World Heart Federation and is involved in prevention programmes for cardiovascular disease. In September 2018, the Heart Foundation of Jamaica commenced its Global Health Advocacy Project (GHAP). The project supports obesity prevention through mass media campaigns for increased awareness of the harms of unhealthy foods and promotion of policy change.

[Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network](#)

The Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network (JYAN) is a youth-led non-governmental organization advocating for the rights of adolescents and youth in Jamaica. JYAN strives to empower youth to advocate issues affecting them and calls for meaningful youth engagement in the decision-making process.