



Press Release

Heading: “Let’s Do Better for the Children” Campaign Relaunched with Urgent Call for Healthy School Environments

Bridgetown, Barbados, 15 September 2025. “1 in 3 Caribbean children is living with overweight and obesity, and this figure is continuing to rise. The drivers are very clear. We have unhealthy diets that are being fueled by the widespread availability, access, and relentless marketing of ultra-processed products,” declared **Ms. Charity Dublin**, President of the Antigua and Barbuda Diabetes Association and Board Member of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC), as she opened the **“Back to School, Back to Health: Nothing at School Should Encourage Unhealthy Choices - Let’s Do Better for the Children”** webinar. This session, hosted by the HCC, on September 11, 2025, brought together health experts, youth advocates, civil society leaders, private sector representatives, and the media to call for urgent action to eliminate predatory marketing to children and young people by the unhealthy food and beverage industry in and around schools.

The event featured the relaunch of the [“Let’s Do Better for the Children”](#) campaign, implemented by HCC in partnership with the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB), the Heart Foundation of Jamaica (HFJ), and the Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network (JYAN), with fresh back-to-school messaging. HCC Communications Consultant **Ms. Tamie Marie** reminded attendees of the stakes: “Sponsorships, scholarships, and giveaways may look generous, but they are powerful marketing tools used by the food industry to increase and normalize unhealthy diets. This campaign challenges those norms and advocates for policies that truly put children’s health first.”

Setting the tone for the panel discussion, **Dr. Asha Pemberton**, Consultant Pediatrician and Adolescent Medicine Specialist and Caribbean Vice-President of the International Association for Adolescent Health, described the gravity of the health challenges she sees in her practice and stressed the need for comprehensive bans: “The frontal lobe, that executive functioning center of the brain, is simply not complete in maturation until age 25...Young people do things that feel good over and over... and that is exploited by all the industries. The food industry knows this because ultra-processed products taste good, they’re crunchy, they’re sweet, they’re salty [and] their dopamine drive happens. They are uniquely targeted. We cannot ask them to make decisions that they don’t have the capacity to do. We have to create an environment that is best supportive of their health and development.” Speaking on the rights-based dimension of the issue, **Shannique Bowden**, Executive Director of the Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network, underscored the urgency of protecting children from corporate influence noting: “Marketing of unhealthy food to children is not just a health issue, it is a violation of rights...It should not be a case where our state actors are allowing undue influence to be within the education system to exploit our children. When we see companies come in with their bright, colorful cartoon billboards and their merch and those sorts of things, that is not only just impacting our children from a space of exploitation, but also infringing on their free access to education....There needs to be a shifting of power to children that recognizes children as rights holders.”

Sharing lessons from Barbados, **Ms. Jan Phillips**, Advocacy Officer at the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados, spoke to the collaborative, multistakeholder approach HSFB has taken engaging with policymakers, parents, vendors, concessionaires, and especially youth, noting that their vibrant youth arm “remains a really integral part of the advocacy. Through their school tours, they've visited 72 schools in Barbados, and they use engaging presentations and fun games to deliver the messages which are currently focused on banning unhealthy food products marketing in schools.” From the private sector, **Mr. Paul Inniss**, Executive Vice President and General Manager of Sagicor Life Barbados, highlighted how businesses can be part of the solution and reflected on their corporate responsibility: “I’m actually working through trying to coordinate between business, the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders... how can we pool resources and become more effective in [managing] the concerns around companies that actually pitch to our kids unhealthy foods and so forth. It is a balancing act... quite frankly, in talking to a lot of them, they actually want to be part of the solution as well.”

Media’s role was underscored by **Mr. Anthony Greene**, President of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union: “We in Barbados and across the Caribbean have challenges with health that we need to address with children with diabetes, with non-communicable diseases, it needs to be a continuous effort in bringing these things to the fore, and I think the media remains in a good position to be able to do that.” Closing the panel, **Ms. Zian Rolle**, National High School Youth Ambassador for The Bahamas, reminded participants of the importance of youth engagement: “Young people are in schools five days a week. We know what will work. We just need the opportunity to share our ideas and help shape the solutions.”

The session ended with a call to collective action, emphasizing that every effort counts toward achieving policy change. Participants were reminded that their unique contributions are vital to building a healthier Caribbean and were encouraged to stay engaged as the movement to protect children’s health continues. The HCC and its regional partners remain committed to raising awareness of the harms of ultra-processed products and advocating for a comprehensive ban on the marketing of such food products in and around schools.

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[Healthy Caribbean Coalition](#) is the only regional NCD alliance of health and non-health civil society organisations. HCC, with 80 plus 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.