



## **61st DIRECTING COUNCIL**

*76th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS  
Washington, D.C., USA, 30 September – 4 October 2024*

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### **Statement on Provisional Agenda 4.3**

#### **Policy for Strengthening Equity-Oriented Health Sector Action on Climate Change and Health (Resolution CE174.R15 [2024])**

**WORDS: 300**

Thank you Madame Chair. The HCC welcomes this Policy given advancing climate change.

The vulnerability of Caribbean small island and low-lying developing states is well-documented in the UN SIDS4 conference. During 2000-2019, nine of the top ten countries or territories with losses from disasters (% of GDP) were in the Caribbean<sup>1</sup>. We note the vulnerability of people with noncommunicable diseases to climate change, with excess mortality after disasters greatly exceeding the event's death toll, e.g., following Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico<sup>2</sup>.

We agree with the lines of action and have the following recommendations:

1. Policy: Given the multi-sectoral nature of health, we recommend that Yolanda's law of Argentina be adapted and promulgated throughout the Americas, requiring mandatory environmental training for members of the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government.<sup>3</sup>
2. Human resources: A climate-literate health workforce is essential for action at scale and speed. PAHO should lead a sustained, well-planned, climate and health sensitisation training program for all health workers with partners such as Global Consortium on Climate and Health Education.

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<sup>1</sup> [The human cost of disasters: an overview of the last 20 years \(2000-2019\) | UNDRR](#) (Page 27)

<sup>2</sup> [Causes of Excess Deaths in Puerto Rico After Hurricane Maria: A Time-Series Estimation - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Yolanda's Law - Wikipedia](#)

3. Public engagement: If climate change is the #1 threat to public health of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we recommend a sustained, well-planned public education campaign on climate and health, using culturally appropriate methods.
4. Vulnerable populations: health systems should pre-identify persons with NCDs and disabilities, so these persons can receive timely help after disasters.
5. Infrastructure: Given the changing behaviour of hurricanes<sup>4</sup>, the PAHO climate-smart health facilities program should be scaled up to cover 80% of health facilities by 2035.

Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> [A Force of Nature: Hurricanes in a Changing Climate - NASA Science](#)

**Statement on Provisional Agenda 4.7**

**Strategy and Plan of Action to Strengthen Tobacco Control in the Region of the Americas  
2025–2030 (Resolution CE174.R7 [2024])**

**WORDS: 261**

Thank you Madame President. The Healthy Caribbean Coalition applauds PAHO for the development of this Strategy.

In particular for the Caribbean region, we are delighted to see the incorporation of an equity perspective to encourage prioritization of population health over industry profits; responsiveness to changing consumption patterns covering conventional and emerging tobacco products; support for a total ban on advertising, promotion, and sponsorship of tobacco products recognising the challenge posed by digital marketing, and endorsement of health-harming products by social media influencers; and highlighting tobacco taxes as the most cost-effective intervention for reducing tobacco use.

Uneven progress among CARICOM Member States in implementing tobacco control measures, in particular smoke-free public spaces, tobacco taxes and bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship; has been compounded by the alarming increase in the use of electronic cigarettes among adolescents and youth. One of the main obstacles to implementing the mandates of the FCTC remains persistent industry interference worsened by overall weak governance including the absence of effective conflict of interest policies.

We call on Member States to commit to implementing the Strategy and Plan of Action prioritising: tobacco taxation; bans on tobacco product advertising; expanding tobacco control policies and programmes to include emerging tobacco products; public education campaigns to highlight the health harms of tobacco and e-cigarette use; and strengthening of measures to proactively prevent tobacco industry interference.

**Finally, Madame President, the HCC wishes to use this opportunity to register our concern with the absence of an agenda item on regional preparations for the 4<sup>th</sup> UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs in 2025. Thank you.**

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### Strategy on Health-related Law: Progress Report (Resolution CD54.R9 [2015])

**WORDS: 300**

The HCC applauds this Progress Report on the Strategy on Health-related Law and its recognition of the advances in laws and regulation to foster healthy environments; the establishment and strengthening of mechanisms to harmonise regulation, build regulatory capacity including the development of health legislation databases, and the formation of networks such as the Caribbean Public Health Law Forum, a multi-stakeholder platform which builds legal capacity to support accelerated public health law in CARICOM.

However, progress in health-related law has been negatively impacted by industries producing and promoting health-harming products due to the absence of regulatory guardrails to protect public health policymaking from undue influence. Weak governance, in particular the absence of laws to address conflicts of interest including freedom of information legislation, presents the greatest barrier to the regulation of commercial actors and NCD progress. Institutionalized, unregulated, multistakeholderism has created unrestricted private sector access to policymaking spaces where power imbalances are exacerbated and commercial interests continue to prevail. CARICOM's recent failure to approve the evidence-based octagonal warning label exemplifies the negative and sustained impact of industry interference.

In the 2023 SIDS Bridgetown Declaration on NCDs and Mental Health, the commercial determinants were recognized as key drivers of NCDs and it was noted that urgent action on these determinants was imperative for sustainable development.

**Madame President**, as we look towards the 4<sup>th</sup> UN High Level Meeting on NCDs – a major milestone and stocktaking moment, Member States will be called on to demonstrate bold action to tackle the commercial determinants of health.

We strongly recommend that in implementing the **Strategy**, Member States of the Americas, in particular the highly vulnerable Caribbean SIDS, with the support of PAHO, strengthen public health governance through the promotion of regulatory tools which safeguard the process of drafting, implementing and enforcing legislation from vested commercial interests.

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Presented by Mrs. Maisha Hutton, HCC Executive Director

- Submitted to PAHO on 20 September 2024