

## Media Release

### **A Call to Amplify Discourse Around Adolescent Pregnancy for the Protection of Young Girls**

Bridgetown, Barbados, 18 October 2021 (PAHO/WHO) - For the second consecutive year the Caribbean is observing Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Week under the theme “No child pregnancy”. The overall objective of the week is to increase commitment from policymakers, program managers, parents, young people, etc. to address adolescent pregnancy as a priority public health issue affecting the health and development of young people in the Caribbean.

The regional event in commemoration of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Week in the Caribbean, is spearheaded by PAHO and UNFPA, in collaboration with other partners, supporting Caribbean youth in advocating for the prevention of adolescent pregnancy. Virtual youth-led events will take place from the 18 -22 October 2021 and will feature a regional launch of the week, an intergenerational dialogue, a virtual town Hall and a technical webinar which will focus on legal barriers that affect child pregnancy all of which are expected to contribute to the formation and strengthening of policies in Member States to bring adolescent pregnancy to the forefront, to protect young girls through education, support, and advocacy.

Adolescent pregnancy hampers girls’ psychosocial development, contributes to poor health outcomes for the girls and their offspring, negatively affects their educational and employment opportunities and contributes to the perpetuation of intergenerational cycles of poor health and poverty.

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) girls from poorer, lower educated, rural, indigenous and afro descendent groups are most vulnerable to early pregnancy. The region ranks second highest in the world for adolescent birth rate at 60.7, and wide variations persist between sub-regions and countries and within countries.

Though some countries have made good strides in reducing cases of adolescent pregnancy through evidence-informed approaches, policy development, advocacy and addressing the key drivers of early pregnancy (such as restrictive laws, discrimination, health-system barriers, unequal gender roles, racism, and social

exclusion), however COVID – 19 has presented unique challenges that prevent girls' access to healthful commodities and educational opportunities. This has in turn fueled occurrences of sexual and gender-based violence.

There is a need to protect young girls and advocate for their access to informed sexual reproductive health. The Caribbean Adolescent Prevention Week aims to provide a platform for Caribbean youth to voice their ideas and concerns about reducing adolescent pregnancy, so that the conversations can continue within their respective countries to enable environments that protect and support young Caribbean girls. The event's activities will include a virtual town hall discussion on Twitter and webinar on the 'Prevention of Child Pregnancies' presented by CARICOM & PAHO.

Links to all virtual events are provided on PAHO Caribbean's Facebook page and we encourage the public and partners to take part in the discussions. Out of this we hope with come informed ideas that will be used to amplify messages about the reduction of early pregnancy across Caribbean media, within community groups and all other relevant areas.

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*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 Sub-regional Program](#) is responsible for providing sub-regional technical cooperation and to strengthen PAHO's engagement with the Caribbean Sub-regional integration mechanisms, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and its various bodies and organs; and to build synergistic partnerships with the sub-regional institutions such as the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and the University of the West Indies (UWI), among others. PAHO's sub-regional 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 Sub-regional Program also plays a role in coordinating among the different PAHO country offices.*