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PRESS RELEASE

WORLD RENOWNED RESEARCHERS CALL ON GOVERNMENTS TO ACT NOW AND IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE HEALTHY FOOD POLICIES

Present evidence is showing that food policies are necessary to curb rising rates of diet-related diseases

BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS, **3 MAY, 2021** – Leading nutrition researchers co-authored an article that highlights the role that ultra-processed food and beverage consumption has had on nutrition-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like obesity and diabetes. The paper, which was published in *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* in April 2021, provides evidence that healthy food policies are effective in reducing consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPF). In the article, the researchers call on governments to act quickly to implement effective healthy food policies, specifically recommending fiscal policies such as taxation, marketing restrictions, healthy school food policies and front of package warning labels.

Sir Trevor Hassell, President of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) welcomed the paper which lends support to regional calls for FOPWL by the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and the HCC; and further supports a series of CARICOM Heads of Government mandates endorsing FOPWL.

To date, several healthy food policies, like taxes and front of package labeling, have been implemented successfully, including multi-faceted policies across Latin America. In the Caribbean, a handful of countries have implemented taxes on sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) and bans on the sale of SSBs in school settings. Greater action is needed however to effectively address the high rates of obesity and NCDs by reducing the consumption of ultra-processed foods defined as multi-ingredient, industrially formulated mixtures containing little (if any) intact foods. Caribbean countries urgently need to scale up the implementation of healthy food policies including mandatory front-of-package warning labeling (FOPWL).

In the article, researchers indicate that front-of-package warning labels have helped consumers to more easily identify SSBs and ultra-processed foods and discourage their consumption. Research has also shown that using an octagonal warning label, compared to other types of front of package labeling, has significantly decreased UPF consumption rates while increasing awareness.

Barry Popkin, distinguished professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill’s Gillings School of Global Public Health said, “Rapidly rising rates of diabetes, hypertension, obesity and many other nutrition-related NCDs is a call for action. We have shown that taxation of both unhealthy SSBs and junk food, as well as front of package warning labels, are effective and there is no reason to wait for further evidence – the cost of these diseases is too high. We have also shown that these practices will impact positively the health of lower income and education households significantly, a major goal of reducing health disparities globally.”

In the Caribbean, 78% of all deaths and 76% of premature deaths (30-69) are attributable to NCDs. In addition, alarmingly 1 in 3 Caribbean children is either overweight or obese which puts them at great risk of developing NCD related complications. COVID-19 has laid bare structural inequities in health and in the NCD response reinforcing the urgency of CARICOM member states to adopt a transformative new vision for people-centered, human rights and equity driven prevention agenda for chronic diseases which prioritizes the implementation of policies such as FOPWL,’ remarked Sir Trevor.

CARICOM Member states are now voting on whether to adopt the Final Draft CARICOM Regional Standard for Specification for labeling of pre-packaged foods (FDCRS 5:2010) which incorporates front-of-package warning label specifications and the PAHO nutrient profile model. The evidence highlighted in this paper shows the considerable effectiveness of this policy in decreasing consumer consumption. FOPWL not only decreases consumption but also empowers consumers, especially the most vulnerable, to make healthier, more knowledgeable choices.

“Caribbean people need more than speeches with familiar statistics and calls for us to change our behaviours in environments where the healthy choice is the often the most difficult choice. Our unhealthy food environments simply must change. Urgent government action is needed now to implement mandatory and effective healthy food policies to reduce the rising obesity and NCD rates in the Caribbean. FOPWL has been successfully implemented in other countries and we applaud these experts for emphasizing the need for governments to act now,” stated Maisha Hutton, Executive Director of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition.

The HCC:

Healthy Caribbean Coalition is the only regional NCD alliance of health and non-health civil society organizations. 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. Follow HCC on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

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