

**For Immediate Release**

**Barbados, Are We Drinking Ourselves Sick? campaign to combat lifestyle illnesses**

**(Bridgetown, Barbados. March 4, 2021)** On World Obesity Day, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados Inc. and partners have launched the “Are We Drinking Ourselves Sick” campaign to highlight the negative health impact of high levels of sugar in beverages, including carbonated and non-carbonated soft drinks, fruit drinks, and energy and sports drinks. The campaign also firmly calls for the public support of, and need for, government policy to help decrease the consumption of sugary drinks for a healthier Barbados.

It is estimated that 83% of deaths in Barbados are caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and 1 in 3 children in Barbados is overweight or obese. Research also shows that 1 in 5 adult Barbadians has diabetes, 66% of adults are overweight, and 33% are obese. These figures are all believed to be linked to the high consumption of processed foods and sugary drinks, which is known to cause obesity which increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, liver and kidney damage, heart disease, and some cancers.”

As the pandemic continues, with added complications like stress and excessive work hours at home, it is critical for Barbadians to have a supportive environment that encourages healthier food choices. Persons who already have pre-existing conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension face greater risks from COVID-19. These circumstances have created an urgent situation that needs immediate intervention.

According to the 2018 Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Public Opinion Poll, almost all of Barbados (92%) support having a National Policy to ensure a healthy school environment and 95% believe it is very important or somewhat important that the government play an important role in reducing obesity. There is a strong desire for a government-led change in attitudes and behaviours to prevent NCDs.

Reflecting on the public’s perspective on a national policy to prevent obesity, HSFB CEO, Mrs. Michelle Daniel said “The connection between unhealthy diets and many major illnesses has long been established, and we see evidence of this every day as our people experience preventable health conditions. We believe that at this time, where health is of paramount importance, Barbados must take serious steps towards curbing NCDs so that persons can live longer, more rewarding lives. It is our hope that with this campaign, people will become more aware of the health harms of excess consumption of sugary drinks, and the government will see the benefit of enacting policy that will protect our citizens and their wellbeing.”

The campaign features a video that chronicles the sugary drinks intake of a middle-aged woman/wife/mother, Rosie, from the start of her day at breakfast, on her way to work, at work, to dinner time. All that sugar adds up, so Rosie became ill and was hospitalized. With her family by her side, she realized the gravity of consuming too many sugary drinks.

The “Are We Drinking Ourselves Sick” campaign will run on radio, TV, in newspapers, and on social media. Barbadians are encouraged to share messages about the campaign on social media using the hashtags: #DrinkingOurselvesSick, #WeDeserveBetter, #ProtectOurChildren, #RightToHealth, #PeopleBeforeProfits #HealthyCaribbeanYouth #SwitchItUp246, and #SwitchItUpBarbados. They can retweet posts or comment on posts from the Instagram or Facebook pages of @hsfbarbados and @healthycaribbean.

The campaign is being implemented in partnership with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC), George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre and other partners.

Further information and stills from the campaign are available upon request.

#### **About the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados**

The Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados Inc. is a non-profit organisation registered under the Companies Act 1982 of Barbados registration number 269 and under the Charities Act 1979-2 registration number 82. The Foundation was founded in 1985 as the Heart Foundation of Barbados and in 2006 embraced stroke to become the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados. It’s 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.

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