

Youth Advocates a Necessary Voice to Childhood Obesity Prevention

Youth advocates for Childhood Obesity Prevention are now using social media as a critical platform to call on policymakers to ban the sale and marketing of unhealthy foods and sugary beverages in and around schools as part of the national Schools Nutrition Policy currently being drafted. This youth-led intervention forms part of an ongoing campaign in the fight against childhood obesity and non-communicable diseases launched in 2018 by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB)

The group of just over 20 young people is an integral part of the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition made up of local civil society organisations, concerned individuals and influencers advocating for evidence-based policies put forward by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to help significantly reduce childhood obesity. Currently, the research shows that one in every three children in Barbados is overweight or obese.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the youth took their cause to the digital world and are using their individual social media platforms to post videos and graphics they have created calling for healthier school environments. To ensure that they are being heard by the relevant policymakers, the youth advocates are tagging both government ministers and technocrats in education; health; youth and sports as well as Prime Minister, the Honourable Mia Mottley.

These informed young leaders explain with their creative content why our school environments, where children spend most of their day, should not be compromised with the sale and marketing of unhealthy foods and sugary beverages. This advocacy also comes as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our most vulnerable groups in society. The youth advocates have been attending local, regional and international webinars, which all point to the reduced access to food items, decreased access to physical activities and spaces to exercise and mental health challenges as a result of the pandemic; all of which point to an expected increase in obesity numbers among children and adults.

The youth represent diverse groups, including University of the West Indies medical and law students; nutrition students; young professionals, athletes, and other dedicated citizens with a shared deep commitment to working for a healthier future for their peers. Apart from their social media advocacy, these young people have been involved in many community activities and schools outreaches over the last two years, educating the public about healthy lifestyles, childhood obesity and its link to the onslaught of non-communicable diseases like diabetes, stroke, hypertension and cancers.

The youth advocates have created relevant hashtags such as #Outtamyschool and #Healthycaribbeanyouth on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to highlight their advocacy efforts.

While they have all been active as individuals, their collective work can be tracked via the pages of the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB) and the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC).

For Further Information please contact

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