



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Caribbean People Support Front-of-package Warning Labels**

Over 90% of Jamaicans and Barbadians combined support front-of-package warning labels. This is why the Heart Foundation of Jamaica, The Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados, The Healthy Caribbean Coalition, Pan American Health Organization, United Nations Children Fund and other partners launched the **#WeSupportFOPWL (We Support Front-of-Package Warning Labels)** mass media campaign, with a united call to action: *Give us octagonal high-in front-of-package warning labels* appropriately on October 14, 2021, World Standards Day, and just ahead of World Food Day on October 16. This year's respective themes are "Shared Vision for a Better World" and "Our Actions are Our Future." The **#WeSupportFOPWL** campaign continues the call for the octagonal high-in warning labels as the CARICOM standard to help Caribbean people easily identify unhealthy foods and therefore make healthier choices. It also highlights the health harms of pre-packaged foods high in sodium, sugar, and fats. The **#WeSupportFOPWL** campaign comes as the region's public health systems grapple with managing the COVID-19 crisis and the burden of preventable non-communicable diseases (NCDs) simultaneously. It is estimated that 76% of premature deaths in the Caribbean are caused by NCDs like hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, and the numbers are staggering when countries are examined individually.

The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that 80% of deaths in Jamaica and Barbados are caused by NCDs. It is also estimated that 36% of Jamaican children between 13 and 15 years are overweight or obese, and 1 in 5 adult Barbadians have diabetes. This has a significant impact on individuals who experience decreased quality of life because of these diseases, as well as the Caribbean region overall, as the WHO noted that NCDs stymie sustainable development.

Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director Emeritus, and Patron of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, Sir George Alleyne, said *"Now, more than ever, is the time for regional collaboration on healthy food policies. A study in which PAHO participated, and the first to take place in the Caribbean, examined the best performing front-of-package labeling. The findings revealed that consumers who were shown the octagonal high-in warning labels had the highest chances of correctly identifying when products were excessive in sugars, sodium, or saturated fats. The data also showed that consumers exposed to this labeling model had the highest chance of correctly identifying the least harmful option, and of choosing the least harmful or none of the products more often."*

Most shoppers spend less than 10 seconds selecting each item, which is not enough time to review current back-of-the-pack nutrition labels. These labels are often complicated and ineffective for most people, so they prefer labels that are clear, and are easy to understand.

Speaking on her country's need for front-of-package warning labels, Executive Director of the Heart Foundation of Jamaica, Deborah Chen, said, *"9 out of 10 Jamaicans believe that it is time to have clear warnings on the front of food products, and we agree with them. The Heart Foundation of Jamaica therefore continues, alongside our partners, to call for a food labelling system that will empower us with the knowledge we need, as we have the right to know what's in*



*our food. For that reason, we believe it is imperative for policymakers to develop labelling standards that will protect the health of our people.”*

CEO of the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados, Michelle Daniel, echoed Chen’s sentiments, noting that 89% of Barbadians also support front- of-package warning labels. She said, *“There is a clear link between our diets and lifestyle diseases that we can no longer ignore. Consumers should be empowered with direct information to make healthier food choices. Front-of-package warnings are a key part of achieving this, and we hope that with this campaign, our collective call will be answered.”*

The **#WeSupportFOPWL** campaign will be aired on broadcast, print and digital media in Jamaica and Barbados, and digitally in select Caribbean countries. The campaign will have several messages, including *“Give us octagonal high-in front-of-package warning labels!”*, *“Let’s continue to put our people’s health first”*, *“We support Front-of-package warning labels. We’re on the side of health, join us”*.

Persons are encouraged to share messages about the campaign on social media using the hashtags: **#WeSupportFOPWL**, **#OurHealthComesFirst**, **#FrontofPack**, **#What’sInOurFood?**, **#GiveUsTheFacts**, and **#WarningLabels**. They can also like, comment, share or repost content from the Instagram pages of **@heartfoundationja** and **@hsfbarbados**, and on Facebook.

### **About the Heart Foundation of Jamaica**

The Heart Foundation of Jamaica (HFJ) was formed, as a non-governmental organization (NGO) by the Lions Club of Kingston, in 1971. The Foundation is a member of the InterAmerican Heart Foundation, the Framework Convention Alliance, the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, and the World Heart Federation and is involved in prevention programmes for cardiovascular disease. In September 2018, the Heart Foundation of Jamaica commenced its Global Health Advocacy Project (GHAP). The project supports obesity prevention through mass media campaigns for increased awareness of the harms of unhealthy foods and promotion of policy change.

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

The Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados Inc. is a non-profit organization 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.

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact the following persons:

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