

Open letter to the Government of Barbados from:
THE BARBADOS CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION COALITION
 ON
World Obesity Day

Today, **March 4th, 2022**, the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (COP Coalition) joins the global health community in marking **World Obesity Day** and shining light on the need for a comprehensive approach to curbing the increasing trends in overweight/obesity across our region.

Obesity is undeniably linked to the onslaught of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs), which scientific evidence shows are responsible for eight out of every ten deaths in Barbados.

In 2016, the Ministry of Health reported that one in every five adults in Barbados has diabetes. This followed the Barbados Behaviour Risk Survey in 2007 which showed that among adults 25 years and older the prevalence of overweight and obesity in men and women was 50% and 68% respectively.

The issues of obesity and the link to increasing NCDs in Barbados is significantly amplified by an alarming global trend of childhood obesity. In Barbados, the 2012 World Health Organisation Global School Health Survey of 26 schools in Barbados indicated that 1 in every three children in this nation is overweight or obese, placing our children's health and future productivity and prosperity at risk.

Living in the era of COVID 19 has shown how damaging the effects of a pandemic can be, especially for persons who were already battling non communicable diseases. This challenge is fuelled by the widespread availability and accessibility (lower costs) of unhealthy products containing high levels of sugars, total fats, saturated fats, trans fat and sodium.

The COP Coalition took note of the present Government's 2022 Manifesto that stated under its achievements that a School Nutrition Policy had been created to sensitise our young children to the risk of diabetes, etc. **While we commend the Government on taking this first step, we look forward to the next step.** Until the School Nutrition Policy is approved by Cabinet and implemented, the objectives and goals of the policy will never be attained.

We have taken note of the change in the national public discourse around the issues of health and the battle against NCDs; we have celebrated government's installation of a Minister within the Ministry of Health and Wellness to specifically tackle NCDs; and we have applauded the change in the portfolio of the Ministry of Agriculture to include Food and Nutritional Security.

However, the time bomb is ticking and our children's lives and the nation's future continue to be at increased risk. A CADRES poll carried out in Barbados in 2018 made it clear that Barbadians were very concerned about childhood obesity and that 99% of them said it was important for government to address obesity and related NCDs.

We therefore challenge our new Government to "Walk the Talk" to implement key policies like Front of Package Octagonal Warning Label on packaged food products and drinks and a strong School Nutrition Policy that will change the school food environment and remove unhealthy food and drinks from our schools. Our children really deserve better.

