

For Immediate Release

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New Coalition Chair eager for the full implementation of the School Nutrition Policy

Dr. Kia Lewis, the newly elected Chairperson of the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (BCOP Coalition), is looking forward to the implementation of the School Nutrition Policy, aimed at creating a healthy school environment for our nation's children.

Speaking on the heels of being newly elected during the July 5th General Meeting of the Coalition, Dr Lewis also notes that another critical area for the 32 civil society strong Coalition, is Front of Package Octagonal Warning Labels. She says, "the Coalition will continue to advocate for empowerment of our citizens through front of package warning labelling."

Dr. Lewis who succeeds the first ever and former Coalition Chair, Suleiman Bulbula, is saying, "As a medical practitioner, I am confronted with the reality of the negative impact of childhood obesity and non-communicable diseases, on the lives of affected individuals and families. I am also keenly aware of the massive deleterious effects at the population level, both socially and financially. The statistics are staggering and disheartening with 1 in every 3 children being either overweight or obese and 8 out of 10 deaths occurring as a result of NCDs annually."

As a healthy lifestyle advocate and a long-standing member of the Coalition Dr. Lewis explains, "The work of the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition has been near and dear to my heart. I therefore count it a privilege to serve in the capacity of Chairperson."

Meanwhile former Chairperson, Suleiman Bulbulia, who was the voice of the Coalition during the harsh realities of the COVID-19 pandemic states, "It has been an honour to chair the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition over the last two years. The journey has been a powerful and fulfilling one. Launching in 2019 with a small team of Civil Society Organizations and individuals, the Coalition today has 32 committed CSOs; 33 passionate individual members and 55 energetic youth advocates."

Mr. Bulbulia who has been a strong advocate for the school nutrition policy, in the prevention of childhood obesity from the early stages of the Coalition, also says, "Having been given a second year to serve as Chair in 2021, I had the privilege to be a part of some important steps forward and some wins, big and small, despite the COVID pandemic, in the fight against childhood obesity and the related non-communicable diseases." His strong advocacy efforts have been one of the key pillars the Coalition has been built on, as he made every effort wherever he was to impress upon policymakers the need for strong school nutrition policy.

The new Chair, who came into office earlier this month, has highlighted a recently released World Health Organization (WHO) 2022 Non-communicable Disease Progress Monitor report, which noted that Barbados, among many other countries in the region, has failed to reach several important health targets in the fight against NCDs, reinforcing our need as a country and a region to prioritize the health of our people.

She also contended, in order to prioritise the health of our people, “a cross sectoral approach is needed, with government, the business sector, civil society, communities and families being engaged in the fight. We will continue to advocate for the creation of a healthy and supportive environment for our children and the wider society, through policy, education and empowerment.”

The new Chair also explained, the Coalition is pleased to have seen some success with the implementation of the sugar sweetened tax as one of the evidence-based methods of reducing consumption of excessive sugars and calories. She said,” My hope is that as a nation and as a region we can continue to work together to reduce the scourge of early death and disability associated with the NCD pandemic and protect the most vulnerable members of our society, our children.”

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