

For Immediate Release

February 17th 2023

School Nutrition Embraces WHO Recommendations for Childhood Obesity Prevention

Barbados has announced that its school nutrition policy to be implemented by April 2023 will embrace the World Health Organisation's policy recommendation to ban sugary beverages in schools. This is latest bold step in the fight against Childhood Obesity, this time taken by the Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training in a massive effort to curve the trend of 31 % or 1 in 3 children that are obese or overweight in Barbados. This announcement was made during the Official Launch of the Barbados School Nutrition Policy on February 15th.

The robust move is being applauded by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados and the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (a partnership of civil society organisations, concerned citizens and youth advocates) that have been advocating for childhood obesity prevention policy frameworks.

Mr. Kevin Farmer, President of the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados, one of the key civil society organisations involved in the advocacy efforts, stated, "this new policy is ground-breaking in Barbados, and it paves the way for government to action the protection of our children and their future as a policy priority, as the WHO highlights six policy areas. He further concluded that given that the Prime Minister has announced the increase in the SSB tax in 2022 to 20%, this latest move will further serve to ensure that childhood obesity becomes less of an obstacle. He said, "The new policy is the correct direction that Barbados needs at this time as the new policy is to be implemented in April 2023. This will ensure health and nutrition is embedded in our children's school environment, rather than exposure to the sale and marketing of sugary beverages to children."

Speaking on the heels of the launch, Policy Champion for the Coalition, Professor Anne St. John, stated "this has been a long hard fight by the Coalition, and we are so happy to see that our government, has embraced this policy action, which can pave a new way for our children within the school environments. Children spend a tremendous amount of time in their schools, and we know that it is there that we can try to change the approach which generations to come have towards food." The Consultant pediatrician further explained, "childhood obesity has been a threat to the health of Barbadian children and required a frontal attack, to be tackled effectively, and the new policy is exactly what is required to provide for the promotion of good health for future generations."

The policy highlights six thematic inter-related policy themes including: food service environment, school curriculum, Physical Activity environment, school health and nutrition services, health promotion for school communities and school recognition.

Chairperson for the Coalition, Dr. Kia Lewis who congratulated the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Wellness for such an all-embracing policy launch, further noted that, "The epidemic of childhood obesity must be given priority in Barbados and globally at this time. The fact that obesity in childhood is so inextricably linked to the onslaught of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cancers, heart attacks, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes and stroke is a serious national issue in a context where 8 out of every ten deaths are due to an NCD in Barbados. We are seeing younger and younger persons struggling with NCDs. We applaud the government's move to remove

sugary drinks from schools and to encourage healthier meals and snacks as recommended by the WHO. We look forward to seeing and supporting the roll-out of the policy in April 2023 and encourage key stakeholders including parents to support the government's brave move to secure our nation's future.”

-The End-