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World Health Day Message

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“Health is a human right and a critical resource for living. There is general recognition that health and access to health services are essential to individual, community and national development. On this occasion of **World Health Day 2018 the theme is Universal Health Coverage**; which WHO summarises as what do you need to get, be and stay healthy.

In addition to access to quality health services, safe medicines and treatments, people also need a safe and healthy environment to be and stay healthy, safe water and food, and systems to monitor health threats, protect health and prevent disease at community, national and regional level.

CARPHA has acted on that recognition through our provision public health services to Member States. For example, for over 20 years our laboratories and networks constantly monitor and test to support the PAHO/WHO priority disease elimination programs for polio, measles, rubella, and to give members Through its regional public goods (RPGs) CARPHA makes its major contribution to the Caribbean Cooperation Health initiative of the CARICOM governments. The Agency provides important support to Member States as these countries, while very diverse, face similar health problems and inefficiencies due to limited economies of scale. All face NCDs and climate change as major threats and also opportunities.

These RPGs include reference laboratory services and the highest level of bio-containment in the English speaking Caribbean, health monitoring, research, training and capacity building; health security initiatives in areas of biosafety and biosecurity, testing and response; and public education.

In 2018, CARPHA will host the 63rd Annual Caribbean Health Research Conference, which allows young and experienced health researchers to share knowledge and information to improve preventive and treatment services. This knowledge sharing platform is a long standing regional public good.

We have joined forces with regional and international partners in the fight against HIV and AIDS as part of the PANCAP. Although the Region has made progress in combatting HIV, it remains the second most affected in the world. CARPHA provides support to national HIV/AIDS programmes and identified activities that focus on reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS on key populations (KP) by identifying and addressing the barriers that KPs living with HIV must overcome to obtain adequate health care.

Across the Region, stigma and discrimination also contribute to reducing access to individuals to their rights or essential public health and preventive services, including when persons delay seeking medical care because of fear. This needs to be addressed at individual, organisational and at societal levels if the goals of public health and universal access are to be met for HIV and other conditions.

The non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer and increasing childhood obesity are major threats to Caribbean countries. CARPHA works with Member States and partners to develop common treatment guidelines and to monitor that patients with these conditions are receiving the appropriate diagnostic and treatment services. Child obesity is a special concern and CARPHA has led the development of a 6-Point Policy Package (6-PPP) for healthier food environments, in partnership with other regional institutions and international partners.

Our response to environmental resource management targets the quality of the environment, and the quality of life and livelihoods of communities. The Agency has committed to promoting water security and preserving the Region's water resources, given climate change and hotter, drier weather. Through our Environmental Health Department in Saint Lucia, we work with Member States to develop water safety plans including water quality monitoring to reduce risks to human health as a result of contaminated water supplies.

The Caribbean's social, economic and health sectors continue to be impacted by mosquito borne diseases. We have not let up on our support to Member States who depend heavily on us to confirm suspected cases of the diseases. Outbreaks of zika, chikungunya and the continued circulation of dengue have highlighted the need for an integrated approach to the prevention and control of these vector borne diseases. Our partnerships with international agencies such as PAHO/WHO, CDC and the European Union has allowed us to enhance capacity in countries to detect and prevent the outbreak of mosquito-spread illnesses.

Tourism is the economic mainstay of the region and Tourism based illnesses can have major negative health and economic impact in the tourism dependent Caribbean economies. Through its Tourism and Health programme (THP), CARPHA promotes and strengthens integrated health and environmental monitoring to reduce foodborne disease incidence and improve food safety. THP is a partnership approach a partnership with the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism industry to strengthen Member States' capacity in order monitor and respond to health, safety and environmental threats. This investment allows fewer, less costly outbreaks and other negative public health events occurring in tourism and thereby a healthier, safer, more reputable Caribbean for both visitors and locals.

Network initiatives such as the Regional Health Communication Network acts as a changemaker. The network provides information that addresses common health concerns and empowers communities to act. This sharing is a regional public good that makes the best available to all and reduces 're-inventing the wheel'. The Caribbean Public Health Laboratory Network (CARIPHLN) which aims to strengthen laboratory services in surveillance, research, prevention and control of important public health problems is a long-standing network.

Access to safe, quality drugs is a human right which CARPHA as the regional public health organisation is committed to facilitating. Through the establishment of the Caribbean Regulatory System (CRS), CARPHA is now able to help countries perform functions such as reviewing, approving and monitoring medicines, in a timely manner, allowing patients faster access to quality drugs. The system also helps to reduce cost of medicines to consumers and the health system, thereby improving accessibility and affordability.

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for our Caribbean people is essential to development. As **World Health Day** is observed on Saturday, CARPHA urges governments to make appropriate investment in public health programmes to promote health and prevent disease, ensure safe and healthy environments, monitor and respond to threats in a timely manner to create and sustain healthy communities for all. This would help reduce the burden of disease and disability in Caribbean populations and give attention to related health-inducing measures in areas such as nutrition, sanitation and education."

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