



Caribbean Wellness Day 2015 Statement

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Good day

"Those who think they have no time for bodily exercise will sooner or later have to find time for illness." In uttering these words in the mid-1800s, British statesman Edward Stanley, referred to healthy ageing as a key strategy for sustainable development and decreasing future health costs. For this reason, Caribbean Wellness Day 2015 focuses on improving the quality of life of the ageing population, with the slogan, ***Healthy Lifestyles, Healthy Ageing.***

On Saturday 12th September, countries across the Region celebrate Caribbean Wellness Day. This annual event is geared at increasing awareness and promoting activities to address the epidemic of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which continues to severely impact the health, economy and development of the Caribbean.

Dr Susan Krauss Whitbourne, a US Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences noted that the elderly Mr Stanley (quoted earlier), had advocated, well ahead of his time, for the importance to health of regular physical activity. Today, we know from many international and regional studies that exercise is very beneficial. For example, a study of 700 men in Trinidad and Tobago over 10 years showed that unfit men were 3.5 times more likely to have a heart attack and 2.5 times more likely to die from it than fit men.

Common preventable risk factors underlying most non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use and the harmful use of alcohol. Statistics show that NCDs which include heart disease, some cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, can result in premature morbidity and mortality.

Recognizing the threat posed by NCDs, in the Declaration of Port of Spain, CARICOM Heads of Government outlined key strategies to prevent, control and reduce NCDs through the life course. This year, 2015, attention is on the ageing population.

In almost every part of the world, life expectancy has risen sharply and is expected to continue rising, leading to a huge increase in the number of people reaching old age. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines older persons as people over 60 years of age. In 1995, the number of people aged 60+ years in the world increased by more than 12 million – nearly 80% of this increase took place in developing countries.

In many of our Caribbean countries, older adults make up one of the fastest growing groups. In 1980, one in fifteen persons was aged 60 and older; projections are that this proportion

will double by the year 2020. Persons are also living longer. Today, a person born in the Region can expect to live 15-20 years more than his/her grandparent.

Adapting to the many changes that come with ageing can be a challenge, but looking after our bodies is an important part of healthy ageing. By engaging in healthy lifestyle practices such as having a healthy diet, exercising daily and not smoking will not prevent changes that are part of normal ageing, but can reduce our chances of developing heart disease, certain cancers, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, dementia, arthritis and other diseases commonly associated with older age. Although having one of these diseases does not rule out independence and health in older age, the adoption of healthful habits can help to maintain well-being, reduce the burden of disability and improve quality of life and reduce future health costs. For more information on Nutrition and Healthy Ageing, please click [here](#).

Healthy ageing is not only a health issue, but an economic imperative so as to avoid future health costs outstripping pension costs. In a health study of 75,000 women in China, cycling to work was associated with a 28 per cent reduction in all deaths for 3.5 hours of cycling per week, compared to none. The study also revealed that overall physical activity levels are an important determinant of longevity, and that health benefits can be obtained through an active lifestyle, exercise, or combinations of both.

Along with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), CARPHA plays a significant role in helping to shape regional and country-level policy and programmes that address the epidemic of chronic diseases. Additionally, CARPHA, CARICOM, Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the University of the West Indies (UWI Cave Hill and St Augustine), the University of Toronto and the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) are collaboratively evaluating the Region's progress on the implementation of the CARICOM NCD Summit Political Declaration, in order to learn lessons that will support and accelerate the attainment of commitments.

In keeping with efforts towards a Caribbean free of the avoidable burden of non-communicable diseases, Caribbean Wellness Day, has become a best practice in the Region, for promoting healthy lifestyles through physical activities and healthy foods.

So, as we celebrate health and wellness, please consider the words of American writer Victoria Moran, who said "Growing into your future with health and grace and beauty doesn't have to take all your time. It rather requires a dedication to caring for yourself as if you were rare and precious, which you are..." I would also like to assure you that age is no barrier to fitness and invite you to visit my blog <https://carljh.wordpress.com/> and follow my personal experiences on healthy ageing in the Caribbean.

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