



MESSAGE FROM DR JOY ST. JOHN

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HEALTH AGEING STARTS NOW

Healthy ageing is important to all of us at every stage of our lives. While healthy ageing starts at birth, and is influenced by genetics, a large percentage of our interactions with our physical and social environments, can shape our behaviours and experiences across our life course.

For this reason, Caribbean Wellness Day 2019 focuses on improving the quality of life of the ageing population, with the slogan, **Healthy Ageing Starts Now**.

On Saturday 14th September, countries across the Region celebrate Caribbean Wellness Day. The annual event is geared at increasing awareness and promoting activities to address non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are recognised as a threat to one's wellbeing, and continue to severely impact the health, economy and development of Caribbean countries and territories.

Statistics show that NCDs which include heart diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, account for nearly half of all deaths of persons under 70 years, and for two out of three deaths overall. The costs associated with these diseases are not always manageable for governments, employers, and families. Healthy ageing is about maintaining the ability that allows you to do the things that are of importance to you. It is a key strategy for sustainable development and decreasing future health costs for you and your loved ones.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines older persons as people over 60 years of age. 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; this amount is expected to 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, if they do not develop NCDs.

Adjusting to the 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 practises we can prevent or delay our chances of developing NCDs, and other diseases commonly associated with ageing. Some healthy behaviours include regular physical activity; a healthy diet; understanding your health issues and medications; limiting your consumption of alcohol and not starting or quitting smoking; and continuing to adapt to changes in your life.

Ageing is an issue that is relevant to 15 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An example is SDG 3 which addresses Good Health and Wellbeing. SDG 3.2 requires nations to reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and wellbeing by 2030.

While the Region has made progress to reduce the threat of NCDs, achieving these Goals requires action. CARPHA plays a significant role in helping to shape regional and country-level policies and programmes that address the epidemic of chronic diseases. We will continue to work with our member countries to support their national programmes, and change behaviours and health practices to reduce the burden of NCDs and their risk factors. Some notable accomplishments are the Caribbean Cancer Registry Hub aimed at strengthening cancer surveillance by building capacity for cancer registration in the Region, and the 6-Point Policy Package for healthier food environments to prevent childhood obesity.

We can do a great deal to enhance the quality of our lives. Adopting healthy habits can help maintain our wellbeing and reduce future health costs. I urge Caribbean people to adopt healthy practices that can keep them healthy throughout their lives and ensure enjoyment of their later years.