



## CARIBBEAN WELLNESS DAY 2016

Message from Dr. C. James Hospedales, Executive Director, Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA)

Our children should have safe and healthy environments, including homes, schools, and communities to ensure a healthy mind, body and spirit. This would enable them to maximize their potential. It is with this in mind that Caribbean Wellness Day (CWD) 2016 focuses on children, under the theme, **Healthy Children in Healthy Environments**.

CWD will be observed across the Region on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September. This annual event launched in 2008, has raised the profile of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which continue to severely and adversely impact the health, economy and development of the Caribbean. CARPHA will collaborate with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), in helping to shape regional and country-level policy and programmes that address the epidemic of chronic diseases, the roots of which begin in early life.

On the heels of Caribbean Wellness Day, the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) is partnering with the Caribbean region in promoting healthy living. This has given birth to [Wellness Week](#) which will be celebrated from September 10<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> in the Americas. Under the slogan “All for health, step up”, Wellness Week (WW) will highlight the connection between health promotion and this year’s tagline for the World Health Day, “Step Up, Beat Diabetes”. WW brings individuals and organizations together to share current initiatives and best practices being conducted in the Americas to promote health and wellbeing, in places where people live, learn, work and enjoy their daily lives.

The Caribbean has the highest burden of NCDs in the Americas, and is in the midst of a rapidly growing childhood obesity epidemic. At least 1 in every 5 of our children are carrying unhealthy weights and at risk of developing NCDs and other problems later in life. With such conditions prevalent in the Region, it is important to get and use solutions that might help with these challenges.

Reducing weight-related health issues is a priority for CARPHA as illustrated in the [Plan for Action for Promoting Healthy Weights](#). The Plan supports measures to effect change at the individual and community levels, as well as to provide medical, health and family support for

the child, who is already affected by overweight/obesity. Recently, CARPHA produced a [Parents' Guide to a Healthier Child](#). Parents can use this as a starter kit to develop a plan to keep their children healthier and reduce their risk of developing NCDs associated with unhealthy weight such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Although lifestyles, including physical activity and diet, are not the only cause of obesity, they are an important factor. Lifestyles can be shaped by individual factors, such as attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge, as well as environmental factors, including the physical, social, political, and economic environments. The built environment, which provides for sidewalks, bike lanes, community parks, green spaces, and healthy schools, is one of these factors that influence lifestyles, body weight, and generally improve health.

CARPHA aims to stop and reverse the rise in obesity in children and adolescents by 2025, and is working with Member States to support national implementation to achieve this. These actions will ensure that the environments in which our Caribbean children live and learn are more supportive of physical activity and healthy eating; that our communities are empowered to embrace healthy living. The measures will:

- establish nutrition labelling of processed foods
- reduce salt and sugar consumption
- advocate to ban the importation of products containing trans fats
- reduce marketing of unhealthy foods and “fast foods” to children
- promote physical activities
- introduce public recreational spaces
- promote consumption of local fruits and vegetables
- align taxes with nutritional value

So, as we celebrate health and our children, I urge policy makers, communities, and each and every individual to act now. Let us tackle public health concerns and bring immediate positive benefits to our children's health. Let us ensure that our children live, learn and play in safe environments as they are important to our future development.