MEDIA RELEASE

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CARPHA and COTED Agree to Tackle Obesity in the Caribbean

Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, November 12, 2013: The Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and CARICOM’s Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) have agreed to work together to reduce environments that promote obesity in individuals, particularly children.

Speaking at the recent Ministers’ Meeting of COTED, the Executive Director of CARPHA, Dr. C. James Hospedales, pointed out that obesogenic environments are a major contributor to accelerating rates of chronic health conditions such as obesity in children, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer; while at the same time significantly increasing the associated costs to families, business and government. Given the huge burden and costs related to chronic non-communicable diseases (CNCDs), Dr. Hospedales proposed that the time is right for trade and health to look at joint measures geared at reducing obesogenic environments and obesity.

CARPHA believes that there is added importance to this collaborative initiative as the Caribbean joins the world in observing World Diabetes Day this week. Research conducted by CARPHA points to steadily increasing rates of obesity in the Region, and this is a major risk factor for the increasing levels of diabetes in the Caribbean. According to Dr. Hospedales, other risk factors include poor nutrition choices, diminishing levels of physical activity, population ageing, increasing urbanization, high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. He said it is also noteworthy that Type 2 diabetes is increasing in children and adolescents due to a prevalence of obesity in these groups.
Dr. Hospedales suggests that it is logical to examine trade policies in relation to health since most of the food consumed in the Caribbean is imported. Although he recognizes the benefits of liberalized trade, he emphasizes that it is also important to consider food security and the accessibility and availability of nutritious food to assist in maintaining a healthy and active life.

CARPHA is confident that collaboration between trade and health can bring many benefits to the people of the Caribbean including sustainable development and economic resilience, which will result from a reduction in the upward spiral of avoidable health costs, while furthering foreign policy objectives.

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