

Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition  
For Immediate Release

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## **Access to Clean Drinking Water in Schools is still a Priority amidst Work to Full Implementation of the School Nutrition Policy**

Ensuring students in every school have access to clean drinking water remains a priority for the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition. Stakeholders are working toward full implementation of the National School Nutrition Policy. Three schools; Graydon Sealy Secondary, Holy Innocent Primary, and Belmont Primary benefitted from donations of water coolers from the Muslim Students Association at Ross University School of Medicine and the Coalition. The donations were given as part of the Cool School Nutrition Tour. A programme conceptualized by the Coalition's youth health advocates, who create and present activities across the island's schools, promoting healthy living to students.

Since the launch of the national school nutrition policy in April 2023, the Coalition and its partners, have continued advocacy and implementation work for children across Barbados, to have the best opportunities to health while at school. This is but one policy in the suite of policies being advocated for to combat the startling rates of childhood obesity. With one in three children, obese or overweight in Barbados, the Coalition started its work to greater health for children in Barbados from its inception in 2019. Since then, the Coalition has worked with the Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training the Ministry of Health and Wellness and a cross-section of civil society organisations, youth, parents and teachers on varied platforms to educate, discuss and inform on the need for a policy agenda to tackle this national concern.

On the presentation of the water cooler donation at Belmont Primary, Chairman of the NCD Commission, Mr. Suleiman Bulbulia, stated, "We are ensuring an environment that encourages and makes it easier for healthier choices, is paramount, as we seek to build out a healthy Barbados. Water coolers in school spaces make access to clean, cool, drinking water easier for children and promote a culture of water consumption over sugar-sweetened beverages." Bulbulia, who is also the former Chair of the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition, further stated, "The Muslim Students Association at Ross University School of Medicine, understands the importance of this effort in providing easy, clean drinking water access to our students in the school environment, and is committed through fundraising efforts among its members to healthy living options being provided for Barbadian children."

These donations are critical for school environments and work simultaneously with the advocacy for octagonal front-of-package warning labels, which are also part of the Coalition's policy agenda. Front-of-package warning labels, particularly the octagonal labels, help individual consumers quickly, easily and correctly identify foods high in sugars, sodium, and fats. This evidence-based strategy is known to support consumers in making healthier choices, to combat non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including overweight, and obesity. The alarming rate of NCDs in Barbados continues to be a major factor that various entities and the government are being confronted with.

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