



Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Programme

Wednesday March 5th, 2025

For Immediate Release

Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados Launches National Campaign Urging Enforced Ban on In-School Marketing

Bridgetown, Barbados – The Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Programme of the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB) launched “Protect Us: It’s Time to Ban Marketing of Unhealthy Foods and Drinks in Schools” on March 4, 2025 in recognition of World Obesity Day. The national campaign advocates for urgent action to enforce the prohibition of marketing in schools, as these activities continue to be pervasive even though it is outlined as prohibited within the 2023 Barbados National School Nutrition Policy.

CEO of the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados, Mrs. Greta Yearwood said, “We are at a critical juncture in safeguarding the health of our nation’s children. While the rollout of the School Nutrition Policy is a significant step forward, its impact is at risk of being undermined by marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks in and around our schools. If children continue to be exposed to messaging that contradicts the pillars of a healthy school environment, our efforts will be in vain. We must take decisive action to protect their well-being and ensure that schools remain spaces that support lifelong healthy habits.” Within the Food Services Environment Policy Statement, it is outlined that “Food and beverage marketing activities are prohibited in or around all schools and tertiary level educational institutions and in their vicinity.” (p.34).

Barbados is facing a growing childhood obesity crisis, with 31% of children overweight or obese. Childhood obesity increases the risk of developing noncommunicable diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and types of cancers in adulthood, posing serious, life-threatening health consequences. The Barbados National School Nutrition Policy has made commendable strides towards addressing this public health challenge; however, stronger enforcement of its six key policy statements is urgently needed.

The World Health Organization recommends a comprehensive restriction on food marketing to children as an effective strategy, to combat long term effects. Exposure to pervasive marketing of unhealthy ultra-processed foods high in sugar, sodium and fats from childhood influences children’s attitudes, preferences and consumption patterns. Children are more likely to want the foods they are seeing marketed to them, which are detrimental to their health in the long run thus underscoring the need for urgent and sustained action.

The “Protect Us!” campaign calls for policymakers to enforce the restriction of marketing unhealthy food and drinks to children in schools. The campaign highlights a critical concern: while unhealthy foods and drinks

have been removed from schools, marketing activities promoting these products persist. This message aligns with the 2023 Barbados National School Nutrition Policy, which aims to foster a healthier school environment by addressing not only the nutritional value of food provided to children but also the marketing of unhealthy food products.

The campaign was launched in collaboration with the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), Caribbean Institute for Health Research (CAIHR), and the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition. It will air on broadcast, print and digital media in Barbados for six weeks. Persons are encouraged to share messages about the campaign on social media using the hashtags: #StopUnhealthyMarketing #ProtectOurChildren #HealthySchools #RightToKnow #HealthyChoices #HealthBarbados. They can also like, comment, share or repost content from the Instagram and Facebook pages @hsfbarbados and visit hsfbarbados.com for more.

-30-

About the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados

The Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados Inc. is a non-profit organization registered under the Companies Act 1982 of Barbados registration number 269 and under the Charities Act 1979-2 registration number 82. The Foundation was founded in 1985 as the Heart Foundation of Barbados and in 2006 embraced stroke to become the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados. Its Childhood Obesity Prevention (COP) Programme supports obesity prevention through mass media campaigns for increased awareness of the harms of sugary drinks and promotion of policy change.

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact the following persons:

Khrystal Walcott, Mass Media Campaign Officer at the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados at 1 246- 240-6743 | Email: massmediacampaignofficer@hsfbarbados.com