



## Caribbean Private Sector Response to Chronic Diseases (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, 8–9 May 2008)

### Executive Summary for the Workplace Wellness Group

**A healthy population is an essential prerequisite for the economic growth and stability of the Caribbean.**

Caribbean political leaders and populations perceive a moral as well as a political imperative to ensure that health gains continue and are not eroded.

CARICOM Heads of Government, in their 2001 Nassau Declaration, articulated the view that the health of the people is important for the creation of the region's wealth. This is the first time that they singled out the health of the people as an essential factor for the region's development.

The pathways that link health to wealth have been clarified. There are now several studies that deal with the economics—not only of the cost of care, but also of the cost and effectiveness of interventions that can lead to improvements in both personal and population health, thus increasing the quantity and quality of human capital.

The information attached helps to present some of the arguments for 'propelling health to the centre of development.'

Chronic noncommunicable diseases (CNCDs) are major contributors to overall mortality. Cardiovascular disease (hypertension, coronary artery disease and stroke), diabetes, and cancer accounted for 51% of all deaths in the Caribbean in 2000.

The Caribbean must seriously address the rising epidemic of obesity, which is *the* common factor associated with an increased risk of CNCDs.

The cost of hypertension and diabetes in Jamaica for 2002 was approximately US\$58 million. Multiplied throughout the Caribbean, this cost implies a tremendous drain on the economies.

These astronomical costs for these disorders speak to the need for primary prevention.

Based on these findings, the private sector is being encouraged to take a more active role in the reduction of non-communicable diseases by implementing measures to reduce the risk of these diseases affecting employees as well as the wider community.

The private sector can create corporate policies that are mindful of good health and that are consistent with the pursuit of corporate profits.

This can be achieved through implementing workplace wellness programs. One of the most important critical success factors for a workplace wellness program is strong senior management support.

Workplace wellness is where a healthy workplace is created that is focused on safety at the worksite, injury prevention for employees and more recently organised programs designed to assist and support employees to choose healthier behaviours and establish healthier lifestyles.

An effective workplace wellness program has an impact on an employees' spiritual, physical, emotional, social, and mental well-being.

The private sector must partner with the public sector to engage in initiatives and advance policies that will alter the pattern of chronic diseases and ensure a more healthy Caribbean population.