



## Chronic Diseases

### Information for Health Professionals

Chronic noncommunicable diseases (CNCDs) today account for about 60 percent of morbidity and mortality in the Caribbean, producing major suffering and costs for individuals, families, governments, and businesses. Chronic diseases have a disproportionate impact on the poor, further exacerbating health inequities.

Caribbean Heads of Government, in response to the heavy burden of noncommunicable diseases on the citizens of the region, issued the Port of Spain Declaration in September 2007, "Uniting to Stop the Epidemic of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases," and declared that the second Saturday in September should be celebrated each year as Caribbean Wellness Day.

We invite you to join us on **September 12** and help support this initiative.

#### What studies have shown:

- Just 30 minutes of exercise daily can cut one's risk of heart attack in half.
- Among patients over 40 years of age, with multiple chronic diseases, those who exercised less than 30 minutes per week had double the mortality of those who exercised more than 30 minutes per week.
- In a follow-up study of people who were 50 years old at baseline, mortality over a 35-year period was 22–32 percent lower among those who exercised.
- In a prospective study of residents of a community dwelling who had no cardiovascular disease at baseline, after 11 years of follow-up, those who were physically active, did not smoke, consumed alcohol in moderation, and ate fruits and vegetables were 14 years younger in chronological age than those who did none of the above.
- Recurrence of cardiovascular events can be reduced 75 percent by treatment with aspirin, beta blockers, ACE inhibitors, and statins.
- Effective therapy can control 70 percent of hypertensive patients to target, reducing hospital admissions by 85 percent and costs by 23 percent. (Only 20 percent of hypertensive patients in the Caribbean are currently controlled to target.).
- Diet and physical activity programmes can reduce the incidence of diabetes by 60 percent.

#### What can be done:

- Observe September as Screening Month to check blood sugar, cholesterol, hypertension, and weight.
- Promote patient compliance with medication.
- Educate patients on self-management of disease.
- Launch CNCD support groups or association chapters (e.g., "Diabetes Association" chapters).
- Get patients to sign wellness contracts.
- Monitor patients with diabetes for foot health, retinopathy and microalbuminuria as well as blood sugar, cholesterol, and hypertension.
- Launch public education campaigns promoting physical activity, with partners such as ministries of sports, faith organizations and the private sector
- Develop self-management tools (e.g., checklists) to help individuals establish health habits such as regular exercise, healthy eating, nonsmoking, and non-harmful use of alcohol.
- Educate the public and health providers on the use of CVD risk charts.
- Sponsor continuing medical education session on the impact of risk factor reduction and scaling up of CVD treatment.