Statement: Underscoring the importance of mass media campaigns to prevent NCDs in Jamaica and around the world

Language English

"Are you drinking yourself sick" campaign by Heart Foundation of Jamaica

Geneva, 1 May 2018.- The NCD Alliance, together with World Heart Federation, Coalición Latinoamérica Saludable, the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, World Obesity Federation and Union for International Cancer Control, wishes to underscore the importance of mass media campaigns to protect and promote public health. We make this statement specifically in light of the news of the lawsuit brought by Wisynco Group Limited to the Heart Foundation of Jamaica regarding, 'Are you drinking yourself sick?', their campaign alerting Jamaicans to the harmful health effects of excessive sugar intake and encouraging them to consume less sugar.

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death and disability worldwide, accounting for 78.5% of mortality in Jamaica in 2015, and 70% globally. Much of the suffering from these conditions are attributable to four major and modifiable risk factors, including unhealthy diet. Unhealthy diets can specifically lead to obesity, cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes, among other chronic yet preventable diseases.

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are markers of and contributors to unhealthy diets, and can lead to obesity, with childhood obesity rates in Jamaica of particular alarming concern. To reduce the contribution of sugar to unhealthy diets, the World Health Organization recommends "reducing the intake of free sugars to less than 10% of total energy intake" in both adults and children.[i] Jamaica's sugar intake has increased significantly in the past 15 years, and population level consumption exceeds WHO recommended limits, particularly in children.

Globally, the commitment to protect populations from sugar sweetened beverage (SSBs) is gathering speed. A package of evidence-based and cost-effective policy recommendations for NCD prevention and control, developed by the World Health Organization, is being implemented by many governments. Suggested interventions within this package include mass media campaigns, nutrition education, improved nutrition labelling, and taxes on SSBs. The work by the Heart Foundation of Jamaica specifically responds to the recommendation for "mass media campaigns on

healthy diets, including social marketing to reduce the intake of total fat, saturated fats, sugars and salt, and promote the intake of fruits and vegetables".[ii]

In promoting the campaign 'Are you drinking yourself sick?' the Heart Foundation of Jamaica has sought to ensure that the population of Jamaica are able to benefit from similar measures to those which have already been implemented around the world. The governments of Hungary, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Tonga have all implemented public awareness campaigns to reduce sugar consumption. Similar efforts have been made by subnational departments of health including in New York and other US states, while civil society organisations in Australia, Colombia and Mexico have strengthened official government responses.[iii] [iv]

With world leaders convening for the third United Nations High-Level Meeting (UNHLM) on NCDs later this year in New York, the NCD Alliance is calling on all governments to accelerate action on NCDs, scale up action on childhood obesity, and implement smart fiscal policies for health, such as SSB taxes. We hope the UNHLM will provide an opportunity to showcase good practice and leadership by governments in the fight against NCDs, such as that of Jamaica, and incentivise others to take bold decisive action to bend the curve on these diseases.

We strongly urge priority be placed on the health of citizens, with the global market shifting toward healthier beverages. We cannot afford for industry interests to dominate public discourse at the expense of protecting the health of populations. We stand firmly with the Heart Foundation of Jamaica and commend its commitment to educating Jamaicans about the harms of excessive sugar consumption. Such actions are in full alignment with its mandate to ensureJamaicans have a longer and better quality of life through the prevention and control of cardiovascular disease.

Download the Statement here [1]

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[i] http://www.who.int/elena/titles/ssbs_childhood_obesity/en/ [3]

[ii] http://www.who.int/ncds/management/best-buys/en/ [4]

[iii] https://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-database [5](see 'I - inform people about food & nutrition through public awareness')

[iv] http://www.vitalstrategies.org/press/hard-hitting-campaign-urges-colombians-to-avoid-sugar-sweetened-beverages/ [6]

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