



Cayman Islands Government

STATEMENT TO  
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
BY  
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J. P.

**MINISTER FOR**  
**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**12<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2008**

## Caribbean Wellness Day 2008

Madam Speaker, the observance of a Caribbean Wellness Day, which will be observed tomorrow, 13<sup>th</sup> September, was one of the decisions taken when the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Heads of Government, met in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago on September 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 to design a plan of action to tackle the epidemic of Chronic Non Communicable Diseases.

Madam Speaker, there is deep concern in this region over the physical, economic and social burdens caused by lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes, hypertension better known as high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, obesity, and certain cancers.

The outcome of the Heads of Government summit was a Declaration calling for the passage of tobacco legislation, a mandate for the re introduction of physical education in our schools and a comprehensive public education programme in support of wellness, healthy lifestyle changes, and the improved self management of non communicable diseases. These are a few of the key initiatives agreed in the Declaration.

Madam Speaker, what also followed from this meeting, is that the Caribbean Community, through the first observance of Caribbean Wellness Day, will jointly, on September 13, 2008, seek to send a message to its citizens -young and old- about the growing epidemic in non-communicable diseases, and the critical importance of adopting healthy lifestyles.

I wish to advise this Honourable House, and the general public, that the Cayman Islands joins our Caribbean neighbours in observing this day, under the theme “Love that body”.

Tomorrow there will be free health checks at all District Health Centres, the George Town Hospital, Faith Hospital and Fosters Food Fair at the Strand. Health checks will include, body mass index, blood sugar and blood pressure. I urge the public to take a few minutes and avail themselves of this service. It will do your body good.

Madam Speaker, I can only hope that Caribbean Wellness Day will provide an added impetus to change behaviours. But we have already begun to act vigorously on this problem, Madam Speaker.

With my colleague Minister of Education, we have already begun to make significant adjustments to protect the health of the next generation. In respect of school curricula, increased emphasis has been placed on physical education.

I anticipate increased partnership with the Ministry of Education in promoting physical activity in schools and to see how best positive dietary habits can be incorporated in the diets of school children.

Madam Speaker, we must hope for the best results from these efforts, knowing that the adults in the community are not so easy to reach. It is a sad reality that we as human beings so often drag our feet when it comes to changing things in our lives, even when we know full well they are bad for us.

For most people, it's well known that the keys to healthier living are simple – eat well, get regular exercise, and, of course, avoid tobacco use.

Yet, knowing this, we suffer through repeated illnesses in our families, we tremble to watch our friends and colleagues fall by the wayside with chronic complaints, yet still we carry on with our risky behaviours. Madam Speaker, you would think people preferred to be dependent on drugs and machines to keep them alive – yet we know it is not so; we know the horrors and heartache sickness can cause.

Madam Speaker, as we strive to turn this situation around, I must acknowledge, , the work of the Non-Governmental Organisations, such as the Cancer Society, the Lions Club, and others, who seek to both prevent diseases and support the sick.

They will soon have a strengthened partnership with Government in these areas, led by our revamped Public Health Department, and through our new Primary Health Care Initiative.

We also look forward to new partnerships, for example between sports and Public Health; as well as dynamic new relationships with employers in support of employee wellness.

Chronic Non Communicable Diseases (lifestyle diseases) are characterized as one of the major causes of mortality in the world, representing 60% of all deaths according to the World Health Organization. Throughout the region there is increasing focus on the alarming increase in lifestyle related diseases and its effect on our economic well being.

Madam Speaker, more than half of the expenditure on health in the region is related to the cost of treating non communicable diseases. These costs are projected to spiral, at a time when we face competing claims for our limited resources.

Here in our own Islands the costs of treating these conditions is mounting rapidly, putting serious strain on public and private resources.

The Region is in fact reputed to have the worst prevalence of deaths in the Americas, resulting from Chronic Non Communicable Diseases.

Madam Speaker, it should be clear that this is a subject of urgent importance, and I urge the community's full attention; if we hope to sustain a high quality of life we must make some real changes, and we need to start now.

May God Bless us all.