

Civil society getting involved

“As civil society organisations we can be really powerful and we have to use that power to hold our government accountable for the public health of its citizens.”
Barbara McGaw, Jamaica Coalition on Tobacco Control

What we know

The CARICOM Heads of Government Declaration on NCDs has reinforced the critical need for physical education in schools and physical activity and healthy eating in all settings.

The Caribbean has double the premature NCD mortality rate of North America – twice as many people are dying below the age of 70 due to preventable diseases such as heart attack, stroke, diabetes and cancer than in the United States.

Civil society organisations (CSOs), especially those with a health-based mandate, are already playing an integral role in tackling NCDs at both national and regional NCD level such as:

- Driving the NCD agenda and engaging in effective advocacy
- Holding leaders and policy makers accountable
- Providing health services, outreach and support for those living with NCDs and their families
- Raising awareness of NCD risk factors and the extent of the epidemic
- Engaging in health education and promotion, including media campaigns, health fairs and events such as fun runs
- Participating in Caribbean Wellness Day (second Saturday in September) and
- Spearheading research and contributing to the formulation of NCD policies.

The regional civil society umbrella organisation, the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, has been a driving force; helping to provide an overarching vision and framework for CSO activity. Building civil society alliances and partnerships can broaden the NCD response by increasing resources, aiding mobilisation and encouraging harmonisation of activities and messaging.

If the multisectoral challenge to NCDs is to achieve greater success, a broader range of civil society organisations needs to get involved: the epidemic now touches all aspects of life and health.



What you can do as civil society

- Form local networks like country NCD alliances, e.g. the Trinidad and Tobago NCD Alliance.
- Become involved/increase involvement in national NCD commissions.
- Share good practices, ideas, information and experiences more effectively across the region and within countries.
- Contribute to a stock of NCD-related stories accessible to all (e.g. through the onecaribbeanhealth.org and healthycaribbean.org websites).
- Get involved (or more involved!) with supporting and hosting Caribbean Wellness Day activities and ensuring that these activities become regular events throughout the year. (They don't have to be high energy fun runs. Something more low-key can still get us fit).
- Step up your advocacy role in public education on NCD risk factors and the importance of diet and exercise.
- Improve and develop your role as NCD advocates, strengthening communications skills.
- Choose specific areas of advocacy such as:
 - Pushing for a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages
 - Supporting bans on advertising unhealthy foods to children
 - Pushing for further implementation of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)
 - Working to make the Caribbean 100% smoke-free in public spaces
 - Working to make the Caribbean free of trans fats
 - Supporting alcohol-reduction policies and communicating messages on the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption.
 - Using urban planning to help create built environments that enable physical activity.
- Work with communities to help take more responsibility for maintaining green spaces.
- Play a more active role in research and national/regional policy development and implementation.
- Be ambitious!

A really good example



Trinidad and Tobago has active civil society participation in the national challenge to NCDs. For example, Caribbean Wellness Day has spawned the Get Moving campaign that sees hundreds of people taking to the streets of the Port of Spain suburb of Diego Martin every Sunday to get fit. The roads are closed to traffic between the hours of six and nine in the morning, and have been every week since 2008, as individuals and families arrive en masse to exercise, walk, run, cycle, roller blade, meet their neighbours and have fun.

For more information go to <http://www.onecaribbeanhealth.org/keep-on-moving-in-port-of-spain/>

Visit our website at www.onecaribbeanhealth.org for much more on NCDs and accelerating action in the NCD response.

