

Caribbean Nutrition Awareness Day 2024

“Healthy Eating, Active Living: Support Policies That Promote Healthy Food Environments”

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In 2005, the CFNI, the region's specialist Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) for nutrition, agreed upon and created Caribbean Nutrition Day, which is observed on June 1 each year. It was reported that nutrition-related lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease were among the leading causes of death among adults in the region, and were on the rise in children.

The day's observation aims to promote and improve the nutritional status of all people in the Caribbean. Healthy eating simply involves making good food choices to fuel our bodies. This significantly reduces our risk of getting ailments, particularly those related to diet. The six Caribbean food groups can help us make health-conscious food choices.

This year's theme "Healthy Eating, Active Living: Support Policies That Promote Healthy Food Environments" invites nutrition and dietetic experts from across the region to:

1. Increase understanding of critical healthy food policies relevant to the Caribbean region.
2. Help the public understand how food policy may promote healthy food environments and improve public health outcomes.
3. Educate the public on how to advocate for and support healthy eating legislation.

Overweight and obesity are major risk factors for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), which continue to be the leading causes of mortality, sickness, and disability in the Caribbean.

Obesity and overweight, as well as the major NCDs - cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, and cancer - are strongly linked to unhealthy diets heavy in lipids (total, saturated, and trans), sodium, and sugar. The broad availability, cost, and promotion of pre-packaged or ultra-processed items play a big role in the consumption of these harmful ingredients.

In response to this public health concern, CARPHA implemented a Six Point Policy Package (6-PPP) in 2017, which received support from the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) and Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD). The Six Point Policy Package (6-PPP) is a regional framework for promoting better eating environments and food security to combat juvenile obesity and NCDs through collaborative policy action. It includes a collection of viable, cost-effective policy proposals for addressing obesogenic surroundings, as well as ongoing consumer education.

These are: (1) Food Labelling; (2) Nutrition Standards and Guidelines for schools and other institutions; (3) Food Marketing; (4) Nutritional Quality of Food Supply – levels of harmful ingredients; (5) Trade and Fiscal Policies; and (6) Food Chain Incentives.

Therefore, to address obesity and NCDs in our region, a combination of policies and public education can create a healthier environment and protect population health. Individual policies alone cannot solve these issues.