

Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition
For Immediate Release

Wednesday October 8th, 2025

New Leadership of Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition Calls for Urgent Action on School Nutrition and Vending Bill

Bridgetown, Barbados – The Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (BCOPC) is announcing its new elected leadership and renewing its call for stronger measures to protect the health and well-being of the nation's children, including the implementation of a fully operational vending policy.

Speaking about her new role as Coalition Chair is Mrs. Nicole Foster, who is also Head, Law and Health Research Unit, University of the West Indies, and Healthy Caribbean Coalition Policy Advisor, said, "I am deeply honoured to serve as Chair at this crucial time and thank the Coalition for entrusting me with this important role." She explained, "Our focus this year will be on turning words into action — ensuring the School Nutrition Policy is fully implemented and backed by legislation. We're calling for a ban on the sale and marketing of unhealthy food and drinks in and around schools. The policy already points the way forward, but it needs the power of law to make it effective and enforceable."

Foster added that tackling childhood obesity is not just a health issue, but a national development and human rights priority.

"If we don't get our rates of non-communicable diseases and childhood obesity under control, Barbados' ability to achieve its socio-economic goals — and to guarantee every child's right to health, education, and a better future — will be in jeopardy. We are ready to work hand in hand with the Ministry of Educational Transformation to make healthy schools a reality."

Meanwhile, newly elected Deputy Coalition Chair, Ms. Stacia Whittaker, reinforced, "I am honoured to be a part of a great movement that seeks to safeguard the health of our children, young people, and ultimately our nation. Whittaker is a Registered Dietician Nutritionist (RDN), with a master's in public health, an Executive Diploma in Human Resource Management, and has acquired the UWI-PAHO Postgraduate Diploma in Health Policy and Health Systems. She further stated, "I look forward to continuing the great work of the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados – Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition, and to working with its partners, including the Government of Barbados and civil society, to create programmes and campaigns that support the Barbados National School Nutrition Policy in its entirety."

She added, "I am proud to be part of a movement that champions the health of our children, young people, and by extension, our nation. While the fight against childhood

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obesity is far from over, every small victory counts — each one brings us closer to a healthier Barbados. Change isn't easy, but by having the tough conversations and creating practical solutions, we can make healthy food more affordable, more accessible, and more desirable."

The Coalition is continuing its critical advocacy for full implementation of the Barbados School Nutrition Policy and for the long-awaited Vending Bill to be brought into operation. The Coalition explains that these actions are vital to addressing ongoing challenges, including unregulated vending around schools, which is now raising security concerns, and to ensure children have access to healthy, affordable food choices across all schools.

The Coalition, which began its work in 2019, emphasizes that the Vending Bill — which would regulate what is sold and where around school premises — is long overdue. It stressed that without proper oversight, vending continues to expose children to unhealthy foods and unsafe environments.

The Vending Bill and the School Nutrition Policy must go hand in hand," the Coalition said in a statement. "Protecting our children's health means ensuring that schools are safe zones for healthy eating — not surrounded by the very foods contributing to obesity and poor health outcomes."

About the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (BCOPC)

The Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition is a multi-sectoral group coordinated by the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados. It brings together civil society, academia, medical and professional organizations to advocate for policies and programmes that promote healthy food environments, physical activity, and the prevention of non-communicable diseases. The Coalition's work supports national and regional goals to reduce childhood obesity and safeguard the long-term health and development of Barbadian children.

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