



2022

Consultation REPORT

HEALTH POLICY FORUM



A Health Policy Forum for Civil Servants in St. Kitts and Nevis was held on Thursday, July 28 at the St. Kitts Marriot Resort from 9a.m. until 3p.m.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this forum was to bring together civil servants from various government ministries and departments to engage them in an in-depth discussion about the multi-sectoral implications of implementing sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) taxes, SSB sale and marketing restrictions and front-of-pack warning labels as policies to support the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

ATTENDEES

There were twenty participants representing ten government departments in St. Kitts and in Nevis. Departments represented included:

- St. Kitts Ministry of Health (Dr. Marissa Carty, Vera Edwards-France, Novelia Rawlins-Nwosu)
- Nevis Health Promotion Unit (Nadine Carty-Caines, Shana Howell, Shevane Nisbett)
- Nevis Mental Health Unit (McMillan Cuffy)
- Nevis Trade and Consumer Affairs (Mentrice Warner-Arthurton, Mechelette Drew-Huggins)
- Nevis Ministry of Education (Kevin Barrett)
- St. Kitts and Nevis Legal Department (De-Jono Liburd, Shyra Wattley)
- St. Kitts Dept. of Gender Affairs (Virgil Jeffers, Vanessa Archibald)
- St. Kitts Dept. of Labour (Claude Huggins, Sarita Manroop)
- St. Kitts Bureau of Standards (Judy Edwards, Sheldon Rawlins)
- St. Kitts Drug Council (Ishelle Huggins, Karimu Byron-Caines)

AGENDA

The Forum agenda was split into two parts. During part one, attendees received information from presenters about the impetus behind advocacy for health policies on NCD prevention and control.

Presentations provided key information about current NCD rates and health challenges faced locally and regionally, the recommended evidence-based policies being championed by WHO/PAHO, and case study analyses and reports on the effectiveness of health taxes in similar jurisdictions. The presentation agenda went as follows (click each to view slides or listen to a clip from presentations):



- [The Role of Government Policy in Combatting NCDs](#) by Dr Patrice Lawrence-Williams, Advisor, Non-Communicable Disease and Mental Health, PAHO

- [Policy Proposals for the Prevention and Control of NCDs in St. Kitts and Nevis](#) by Dr Marissa Carty, NCD Coordinator, Ministry of Health, St. Kitts and Nevis

- [Our Experience of Developing and Implementing a Sugar Tax](#) by Dr Virloy Lewin, Health Promotion Coordinator, Department of Health, Bermuda

- [Fiscal Health Policies](#) by Dr Evan Blecher, Economist, Global Tax Program, The World Bank

For Part two of the forum, attendees were divided into three breakout groups to discuss the implications of implementing each policy recommendation being considered. The results of each round of discussion are summarized as follows.

DISCUSSION SUMMARIES

Round 1

How does the ___ sector play a part/consider their role in the prevention and control of NCDs in St. Kitts and Nevis?

Education

- Improve food and nutrition of students through healthy School Meals Programme. Adopt and build on School Meals Programme model in Nevis where parents pay \$25 weekly for a menu that uses locally grown produce to create various nutritious meals. Partnerships with the Ministries of Health and Agriculture help to make School Meals healthy and sustainable.
- Standardize Health and Wellness curriculum from early childhood to high school.
- Make physical education mandatory for all levels.
- Educate students about NCDs and lifestyle prevention strategies from early childhood.

Legal

- Support legal drafting of laws pertaining to health like the Tobacco Act.
- Offer support for health policy review.
- Existing challenges were noted with regards to limited personnel resources who can be assigned to support MoH with drafting and reviewing laws and policies.



Labour

- Support through alignment with workplace monitoring for environmental health hazards like air quality, mould and asbestos.
- Can advocate for non-discrimination of workers with NCDs, and for employers to provide free drinking water in offices for workers.
- There is still a need for the Occupational Health and Safety Act to be adopted and enforced so Labour Inspection Officers have authority to influence improvements that lead to healthy work environments.

Health and Health Promotion Units

- Produce education and awareness campaigns on NCDs and healthy eating.
- Host shows and programmes to demonstrate how to cook and eat more healthy meals.

Bureau of Standards

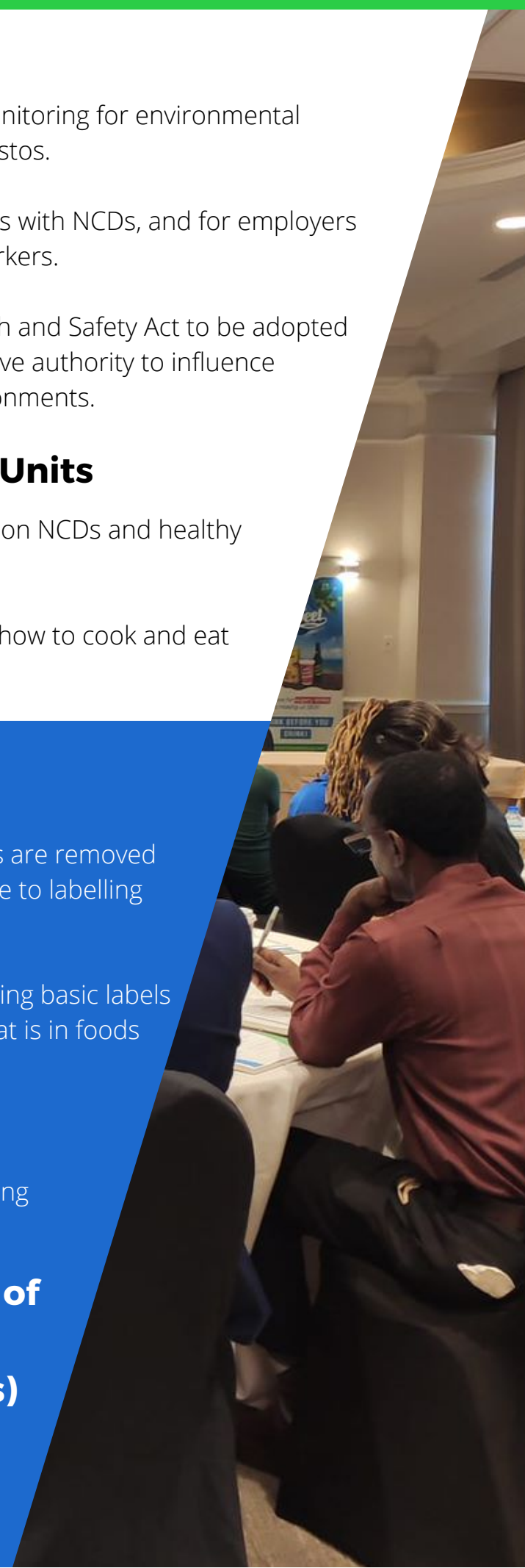
- Inspect supermarkets to ensure expired foods are removed from shelves and to monitor/assess adherence to labelling standards.
- Work on national food safety standards including basic labels on food products so consumers can know what is in foods locally made, processed and produced.

Drug Council

- Build awareness around harmful drugs including alcohol and tobacco.

Dept. Of Gender (i.e., Ministry of Social Development, Gender Affairs, Aging and Disabilities)

- Provide counselling and food vouchers/food baskets that include fewer products that lead to NCDs.



WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF IMPLEMENTING AN SSB TAX ON EACH RESPECTIVE SECTOR?

- Stakeholders share a common understanding and familiarity with the NCD health burden and so were not opposed to imposing an excise tax on SSBs.
- Current tax levy on SSBs of 5% is too low and ineffective to influence consumer behaviour. Minimum increase to at least 20% was agreeable.
- Stakeholders appreciated the presentation on the Bermuda experience and recommended that St. Kitts and Nevis broaden the scope of the tax to make it a standard sugar tax based on quantity in any beverage or food product, especially noting that foods like cereals and snacks are a major part of people's diets.
- There was consensus and strong conviction about any sugar or SSB tax revenue being reinvested into public health. Participants suggest that at least 60%-70% of tax revenue be earmarked for health; specifically, it was suggested that the revenue be used to fund the National Health Insurance Scheme.
- Discussion around the sustainability of impact on behaviour change led to considerations of how
 - manufacturers can be influenced, over time, to reformulate their products to include less added sugar and to ban the use of artificial sweeteners.
- The South Africa SSB tax model was referenced as a model to adopt since the tax in this jurisdiction forced manufacturers to reformulate. Similarly, a regional approach to standardise acceptable sugar content in manufactured beverages was suggested.
- More education and awareness were said to be needed about the dangers of sugar so that people can start using less sugar in their own cooking and general nutrition.
- Socioeconomic impacts of tax should be considered. Alternative healthy options would need to become cheaper to get more people to buy these products. Water should have a price cap, so it is always the cheaper option on the market.
- Questions were raised around whether taxing SSBs would make alcoholic beverages cheaper and preferable as an option. This was a new consideration to note as an anticipated indirect impact of SSB taxes.

Round 2

WHAT ARE THE SECTOR-SPECIFIC OR GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESTRICTING THE SALE AND MARKETING OF SSBS IN SCHOOLS?

- Stakeholders drew consensus on making schools SSB-, alcohol- and smoke-free by implementing restrictions on these products in those environments.
- Management of vendors including enforcement of food handlers' regulations and imposition of penalties and fines for vendors who do not respect zoning restrictions
- Ways to engage vendors in education and awareness campaigns about the harmful effects of sugar, and facilitate training on how vendors can produce drinks with less added sugar and make healthy snacks for sale instead of unhealthy products
- Resistance from children and parents was a common concern, since children are known to reject foods that they are not familiar with or bring SSBs and unhealthy snacks from home.
- A challenge was noted around school sports and other events sponsorship from SSB companies that promote and provide free SSBs. This is a conflict of interest that was raised as a challenge for schools implementing SSB bans.
- Suggestion to form new partnerships between vendors and agro-food processors so school vendors can purchase healthy snacks directly from agriculture co-ops and agro-processors at a reduced cost for sale to students.
- The health and wellness curriculum should be mandatory and teach children about the harmful effects of sugar, sodium and fats so they understand that buying and consuming SSBs and unhealthy snacks leads to negative health outcomes.



Round 3

WHAT ARE THE SECTOR-SPECIFIC OR GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING FRONT-OF-PACK WARNING LABELS (FOPWL)?

- Stakeholders were supportive of improving labelling standards in St. Kitts and Nevis, particularly considering little adherence to current bureau standards.
- Stakeholders generally expressed the need for better labelling standards since beverages and foods are still currently produced with no labels at all.
- The PAHO octagonal warning label was appealing to stakeholders but there was some contentious discussion around the formula used to determine the threshold for “high” traces of sugar, sodium and fats. The PAHO model was considered too strict, particularly by representatives from the Bureau of Standards and Trade. Using the PAHO labelling standard would mean that the majority of locally made beverages would be labelled “high in sugar” since the calculating formula is so stringent.
- Challenges with implementing FOPWL include 1) the increase in cost to local vendors, producers and manufacturers who will have to test products to quantify amounts of each ingredient, 2) unavailability of central facility to enable this testing, and 3) concerns around price inflation of products because of input costs from labelling processes.
- Since St. Kitts and Nevis abstained from the CARICOM vote on accepting octagonal warning labels as a regional labelling standard, other options have been and are being considered. However, since the lead department on this policy is the Bureau of Standards and not the Ministry of Health, the interests and objectives differ. Whereas the Ministry of Health is supportive of the PAHO model to deter consumers, the Bureau of Standards weighs the cost loss/price benefits more so than the potential positive health impacts.





EVALUATION SUMMARY

Evaluation reports completed by each attendee indicate that the Health Policy Forum was informative and that the presentations by speakers were well-received and provided new information and insight on public health policies. Overall, the Forum received an average rating of 4.5/5 (very good) after feedback was collated on the agenda, ideas/information shared, facilitation experience and organisation.