



Communiqué

5th meeting of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Council of Ministers-Health (COMH)

Theme “Transformation for Universal Access- Leaving No One Behind”

Radisson Hotel, St George’s, Grenada

Oct 18th and 19th 2018

The Fifth meeting of the Council of Health Ministers of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was convened immediately following the 32nd OECS Pharmaceutical Procurement Service (PPS) Policy Board meeting, on 18th and 19th of October 2018 at the Radisson Hotel in St George’s Grenada under the chairmanship of Hon Deputy Premier Delmaude Ryan from Montserrat, in keeping with the practice of alphabetical rotation. The Council of Ministers recognised and noted with deep appreciation the generous hospitality of the people and government of the host Member State of Grenada.

Ministers of Health in attendance:

Hon. Evans McNeil Rogers, Chief Minister and Minister for Health and Social Development, **Anguilla**

Hon. Molwyn Joseph, Minister for Health and The Environment, **Antigua and Barbuda**

Hon. Dr. Kenneth Darroux, Minister for Health and Environment, **Commonwealth of Dominica**

Hon. Nickolas Steele, Minister for Health and Social Security, **Grenada**

Hon. Mary Isaac, Minister for Health and Wellness, **Saint Lucia**

Hon. Robert T.L.V. Browne, Minister for Health and the Environment, **St. Vincent & the Grenadines**

Hon. Mrs. Delmaude Ryan, Minister for Education, Health, Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs, **Montserrat**
(Chair)

Hon. Lt. Col. Jeffrey D. Bostic, Minister for Health and Wellness, **Barbados (Observer)**

Also in attendance as head of delegation:

Dr. Irad Potter- Chief Medical Officer **British Virgin Islands**

The formal opening ceremony was held on the evening of Oct 18th at the Radisson Hotel, with the Director of PAHO, Dr. Carissa Etienne as the feature speaker. Speeches were given by the outgoing chair, Hon Nickolas Steele from Grenada and the incoming chair Hon Delmaude Ryan. Mr. Francis Burnett was recognized for his outstanding career contribution to ensuring access to essential medicines in the OECS. Dr. Etienne, herself a citizen of the OECS, gave a passionate plea to Ministers to deliver on her career long dream of universal access and to leave no one behind.

- **Major Areas of Discussion**
- **Health Achievements, New Partnerships and Opportunities**
- **HIV and TB Elimination in the OECS**
- **Extending Access to Health: An All of Society Approach**
- **Putting the Fort de France Declaration into Action: Working together**



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Health Achievements, New Partnerships and Opportunities

The OECS Health Unit currently in its second year of operations has afforded the OECS with new partners and opportunities in the area of Health. The World Diabetes Foundation has funded the “OECS Diabetes Prevention and Care” project to US\$400,000 and has approved a further US\$379,000 for the project to address diabetes in disasters. Ms. Lydia Atkins, Programme Officer presented the planned activities in collaboration with CARPHA, WINDREF, the Ministries of Health and the Diabetes Associations of participating member states.

The relationship between the OECS and the French Territories have also deepened with Martinique as a member. This has afforded the OECS Member states access to new opportunities and source of funding. One of these is the INTERREG CARES project which was approved in December 2017 for a total value of € 6.4 mil. The project will focus on capacity building, improving access to services in French territories, and harmonization of protocols and systems and will be launched in November.

CARPHA and PAHO continue to be close partners working with OECS member states to achieve the agreed priorities.

HIV and TB Elimination

The 3year US 5million dollar Global Fund OECS HIV/TB Elimination Project comes to an end in March 2019. To date 76% of planned activities have been completed and 99% started. Major achievements over the last year include the introduction of the OECS regional electronic surveillance software as well as the completion of studies to determine barriers to care and behaviours of populations at risk. In addition, all persons living with HIV who are on treatment continued to have 100% availability of their medications over the last year. The OECS Regional coordinating mechanism, under the chairmanship of Minister Mary Isaac from Saint Lucia, was successful in negotiating the continuation of the grant for an additional 3yrs (to 2021) and US \$3 million dollars.

The Ministers of Health noted with concern the increasing incidence of HIV among the youth as well as the dwindling funds from donor agencies. In order to reach the goal of elimination the Ministers noted the need to elevate to the level of the Authority the prioritization of financing to ensure sustainability of HIV programs beyond 2021 and to target the youth. The Ministers also recognized the unique role of civil society in reaching high risk populations and the need to strengthen relations.

There was also recognition that rates of TB were very low in the OECS and there was an opportunity for the countries to lead the way in TB Elimination.



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Extending Access to Health: An All of Society Approach

The Ministers of Health received presentations from the Health Minister of Malta (Hon Christopher Fearné, the President of the Heart & Stroke foundation of Barbados (Dr. Kenneth Connell) and the Chair of the CARICOM Heads of Social Security noncommunicable disease working group (Rhesa Cartwright) on the respective roles of private sector, civil society and social security in access to health.

Ms. Rhesa Cartwright noted that impact of chronic noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cancer on Social Security Systems which are dependent on a healthy working population. In order to ensure sustainability, Social security institutions are becoming more involved in the prevention activities. Dr. Kenneth Connell reinforced that civil society organisations have a complementary role to play in the delivery of care, not just in HIV but also in chronic diseases. Hon Christopher Fearné from Malta highlighted the need to engage the private sector and presented the current electronic patient record which allowed any provider, public or private, to access and adjust the full record of any patient. All that is needed is the PIN from both the provider and patient.

The Minister for Health from Malta also highlighted the need for government to always be in the lead and to provide appropriate oversight when care is delivered through public private partnerships. The Council of Ministers agreed that the social protection and oversight role was one of the government and Ministries to Health to ensure no one is left behind.

Putting the Fort de France Declaration into Action: Working together

The OECS Health Ministers made 10 commitments in the Fort de France Declaration on Solidarity in Health, with a common theme of working together and sharing resources in order to achieve ‘Health for All’. Several presentations were made to advance opportunities for solidarity. These included maximizing the use of the OECS Pharmaceutical Procurement Service to procure more up to date medications to tackle chronic diseases; exploring partnerships with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the French territories in order for the OECS region to meet International Health Regulations; joint health information mechanisms including OECS Web based Cancer and Diabetes registries; and exploring regional practices that can set the foundation for an OECS regional health insurance mechanism.

The Ministers of Health committed to continue to support the work of the OECS Health Unit and agreed to have the 6th Council of Health Ministers meeting in Montserrat in October 2018.