



## OPEN LETTER

to the National Standards Bodies of CARICOM

*in reference to the*

**CARICOM Member State Voting on the Final Draft CARICOM Regional Standard for Specification for labeling of pre-packaged foods (FDCRS 5)**



**The Octagonal Warning Labels help consumers **#ActOnFacts****

4 October 2023

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Dear CARICOM National Standards Bodies,

We are writing as leaders in health and nutrition across the Caribbean to urge your stakeholders representing diverse sectors of society and senior policymakers in Ministries of Trade, Commerce, Business, Finance, and Agriculture, to support the approval of the *Final Draft CARICOM Regional Standard for Specification for labeling of pre-packaged foods (FDCRS 5)*, which includes the **octagonal front-of-package warning label** and the PAHO Nutrient Profile Model.

**Caribbean people deserve the best nutritional labelling system to reduce malnutrition in all its forms—including undernutrition and overnutrition—and improve their health.**

Among various nutritional labelling systems, scientific evidence, including from the Caribbean region, underscores the superior effectiveness of the **octagonal warning label**, which empowers consumers to quickly, correctly, and easily identify products with unhealthy nutritional profiles.

Caribbean countries have some of the world's most alarming rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and obesity. These conditions not only place immense strain on our healthcare systems, but also pose a significant threat to our economic stability, and, as underscored in the recent Bridgetown Declaration on NCDs and Mental Health, they jeopardize our regional development objectives and the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

At the heart of these diet-related health challenges lies the overconsumption of foods high in sodium/salt, sugar, and fats – a situation which is in part due to the lack of awareness of the

content of many foods. Current nutrition labels are difficult to read and understand and are often misleading.

**Caribbean people deserve access to a labelling system that has proven its effectiveness in helping consumers make informed food choices.**

Studies conducted globally, as well as regionally in Jamaica and in Barbados, show that the octagonal warning label outperforms all other labels in allowing consumers to quickly, easily, and correctly identify foods high in sodium/salt, sugar, and fats<sup>1</sup>. In Barbados, the introduction of octagonal warning labels has the potential to reduce NCD deaths by 16%, while saving the government in excess of 700 million US dollars in mortality costs annually<sup>2</sup>.

The impact of the octagonal warning labeling system extends far beyond the supermarket aisle. It has the capacity to easily identify those food products which should be regulated in various settings, including schools, and be subjected to taxation (unhealthy products) and subsidies (healthy products). The HCC and partners' newly launched campaign, '*Octagonal Warning Labels help consumers #ActOnFacts*' speaks to this and the other co-benefits of implementing this labelling standard.

**The time to act is now.**

The time to act is now, as we echo the commitment made by Caribbean Heads of State and Government in the 2007 Declaration of Port of Spain to address the "epidemic of chronic NCDs" by prioritising the prevention of NCDs through strong policies. Approval of this *Final Draft CARICOM Regional Standard* and the **octagonal warning label** not only honours this historic commitment, but also represents a significant step towards safeguarding the nutrition and health of our citizens, particularly those living with obesity and NCDs. The rising levels of childhood obesity in the region and the associated increased risk of NCDs, heighten the imperative for action; Caribbean people have a right to simple and easily understood information about the food they consume; right now, they do not.

Our collective voices build on the signatures of support from over 400 Caribbean public health professionals, academics, and ordinary citizens, and over 40 regional organisations.

We implore your stakeholders to consider the urgency of this matter and the profound impact that your decision will have on the immediate and future nutrition, health, and well-being of Caribbean people, and, by extension, national and regional development.

By approving the Final Draft CARICOM Regional Standard for Specification for labelling of pre-packaged foods and the **octagonal warning label**, through a fair and balanced vote including all key stakeholders, you will send a clear message of commitment to improve the lives of citizens across CARICOM and securing a healthier future for the region.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/13/4/e065620>

<sup>2</sup> [https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/57989/PAHONMHRF230040\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/57989/PAHONMHRF230040_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

## SIGNED

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