

## **Why Front-of-package (FOP) nutrition labeling in Jamaica? *Empowering consumers to make healthier choices***

### **THE FOODS WE EAT, OVERWEIGHT, OBESITY AND NCDS**

- Overweight and obesity are now dramatically on the rise in Jamaica. One in two Jamaicans (54%) are overweight/obese including two thirds of Jamaican women 15 years or older.<sup>1</sup> Between 2010 and 2017 obesity among Jamaican children aged 13-15 increased by 68%.<sup>2</sup>
- Increased availability of pre-packaged foods and beverages globally<sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup> combined with aggressive marketing, has dramatically changed the way people eat, resulting in diets that are much less healthy.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>
- In Jamaica, like the rest of the world, our diets are now dominated by imported processed and ultra-processed pre-packaged foods, many of which have high levels of added sugars, sodium, saturated fats, and refined carbohydrates.<sup>12,13,14,15,16</sup> These nutrients of concern are connected to increased obesity and chronic nutrition-related diseases.<sup>17,18,19,20,21,22</sup>
- The WHO has recommended reduction in consumption of these foods to tackle the growing obesity epidemic.<sup>23</sup>

### **MAKING THE DIETARY SHIFT FROM UNHEALTHY TO HEALTHY**

#### **Consumers Need Help Making Healthier Choices**

- Not only have food and beverage products become less healthy, the sheer number of choices in stores make it difficult and confusing for consumers to select healthier foods.<sup>7</sup>
- Currently, nutrition labelling (nutrition facts panel) on the back of the package is not mandatory for all products in Jamaica therefore some products don't have it. Even if the product has a nutrition facts panel, research has shown this system may not be sufficient in communicating if a product is unhealthy and simpler, impactful, easier to interpret options are needed.
- Most shoppers spend fewer than ten seconds selecting each item — not enough time to review current nutrition labels, which are complicated and ineffective.<sup>24,25,26</sup>
- Nutrition labelling is also not standardized resulting in a range of products in the country with variations in nutritional labelling, unverifiable nutritional claims, absent nutritional information/labels, and nutritional information in foreign languages. Consumers are left at a disadvantage without the tools needed to make informed choices about the food they purchase for themselves and their families.
- Front of Package (FOP) Warning Labels Empower Consumers to make Informed and Healthier Choices
- Consumers need a clear and easy way to make healthier choices. Shoppers prefer simple FOP labels that are immediately visible and require less time to assess<sup>27,28</sup>
- Simple front of package negative warning labels that identify unhealthy products are most effective in discouraging unhealthy food choices.<sup>29</sup>
- A 2018 study conducted in Jamaica showed that 91% of respondents agree that there should be clear warning labels on the front of food and beverage packages to warn consumers when products are high in sugar, salt or fats.<sup>30</sup>

## FOP Warning labels are most effective labelling system to date

- Research has shown that warning labels are linked to decreased purchases of sugary beverages, decreased perceptions of their healthfulness<sup>31</sup> and decreased purchasing intent<sup>20,32</sup> and may also encourage manufacturers to improve nutritional qualities of their food.<sup>33</sup>
- Studies conducted in 2017 found that warning labels were better able to help consumers correctly identify products with high content of unhealthy nutrients than the industry endorsed guidelines for daily allowance (GDA) or traffic light labels<sup>34</sup> and that warning labels had greater relative impact on children's food choices compared to the traffic light system.<sup>35</sup>

## Global adoption of front of package warning labels

- Leading health organizations like the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) have recommended that countries in the region adopt warning labels along with other policies to tackle the global obesity epidemic.
- “High in...”, “Excessive...” and other warning terms are increasingly gaining popularity in South America and globally. They are already in place in Chile, Israel, Canada, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela and are under consideration in Brazil.
- The Codex Alimentarius Commission, the internationally recognized body developing food standards, has approved ongoing work for international guidance on FOP nutrition labelling in 2016.

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