

**Statement by the Permanent Mission in Geneva on
behalf of the Minister of Health, the Honourable
Terrence Deyalsingh, for the WHA 2024**

May 27th 2024

WHO Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland

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Salutations: TBC

A pleasant good day to all.

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Health, under the patronage of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT), is a signatory to the agreement among member countries, which was introduced at the United Nations Assembly on September 23rd, 2019, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1), whereby all countries have committed to try to achieve universal health coverage by 2030, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines.

At this assembly, it was reaffirmed that health is a precondition for and an indicator of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The goal of every human being having access to health services ranging from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care was reinforced.

As a result of the global effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, of which we are all familiar, The UN General Assembly convened three High-Level Meetings on health during its 78th session (UNGA 78) in New York in September 2023. These high-level meetings, were the perfect opportunity to place universal health, back on the international political agenda.

Today at this World Health Assembly, I am pleased to report that Trinidad and Tobago is fulfilling our commitments made at these meetings, and still remains one (1) of approximately seventy-two (72) countries in the world to offer free universal primary healthcare to its citizens

which is in complete alignment with the assembly's theme of "**All for Health, Health for All**".

While we acknowledge that the provision of healthcare services is continuously evolving and there will always be room for improvement, we are still working steadfastly and continuously to ensure that health services are optimised so that medical treatments, education, practices and policies are relevant, measurable, technology driven, innovative and most importantly, accessible.

The Ministry, continues to work closely with various multi-sectoral stakeholders, including our international partners such as PAHO and the WHO, to ensure that fundamental needs analysis and assessments are regularly conducted, with the aim of addressing optimising efficiency. The implementation of these quality assurance measures, have already resulted in drastic improvements to healthcare services related to Blood Transfusion, HIV and AIDS, Women's Health, Mental Health and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

- In respect of our national efforts to transform our National Blood Transfusion Services to a system of Voluntary Non-Remunerative Blood Donations (VNRBD) as advocated for by trusted global healthcare experts and organisations, I am pleased to report that for the period June 2022 to present, we have increased voluntary donors from 0.5% to 9.5%
- Our HIV efforts have also recommenced with great vigour, after being affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and we have been engaging our citizens while targeting key populations who are statistically more susceptible to contracting the disease, in continuous sensitisation and education on prevention, treatment and care. As of

December 2022, Trinidad and Tobago has achieved its goal for the first 95, which means that 95% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) know their status. For the same reporting period, we have almost achieved our goal for the third 95 SDG, as 93% of those on treatment, have suppressed viral loads and we are on par to achieve the remainder, as we are fully mobilised in our efforts to achieve our 2030 SDGs. Regarding our second 95 SDG target, which entails 95% of diagnosed PLHIV being on treatment, we are currently at 63%. However, we are confident that this figure would soon increase as a result of our many activities in this field such as strengthening testing services, enhancing treatment accessibility, promoting viral load suppression and many others.

- Trinidad and Tobago continues to invest in Women's Health and the Ministry of Health has been focusing on all issues related to women's health from maternity to menopause and everything in-between. Our Directorate of Women's Health, continues to advance the importance of key women's health topics to the population to educate them on the services that are available within the public healthcare system. Trinidad and Tobago continues to progress in the area of women's, children's, and adolescents' health and has already achieved its SDG targets, much before the 2030 deadline. The maternal mortality ratio for 2023 was 7.9 per 100 000 live births and the neonatal mortality rate for 2023 was 9.9 per 1000 live births.
- Mental health continues to be a prime area of concern for the Ministry of Health as we are fully cognisant that healthy minds are a prerequisite of positive behaviours which lead to health conscious individuals. The Ministry is currently decentralising mental health services across the nation, making it more accessible as a community based model of care, which would have a greater impact. We have made great investments in

this area that are complemented by our infrastructural projects, which allow us to provide blanket mental health services across a broader spectrum.

- In our efforts to curb the destructive effects of Non-Communicable Diseases on our nation, the Ministry of Health, has also redirected its focus away from only healthcare services provision, toward behaviour change and modification strategies, which are intended to prevent the proliferation of these Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), the number one cause of premature deaths in Trinidad and Tobago. Among the many initiatives that have been implemented in this mission, the Ministry of Health also recently embarked on the WHO STEPwise approach to NCD risk factor surveillance by reintroducing the National STEPS Survey which will run from April to July, 2024. The aim of this survey is to gather information from households across Trinidad and Tobago, on lifestyle practices that impact the health of persons within our population; such as dietary practices, levels of physical activity and other behavioural risk factors such as tobacco use and alcohol consumption.

Data collected from STEPS, will be used to assess and monitor the prevalence and trends of NCD risk factors in Trinidad and Tobago, ultimately contributing to the development of evidence-based policies and interventions to prevent and control NCDs.

Our commitment to our Universal Healthcare obligations, can further be seen by investments in healthcare infrastructure, having completed several major projects in all geographical locations of the country; *the Point Fortin Hospital, the Roxborough Hospital in Tobago, the Arima Hospital, the Diego Martin Health Centre, the Corporate Headquarters of the Ministry of Health, The San Fernando Rehabilitation works project and the Sangre Grande Hospital*

Campus; which are intended to drastically improve the delivery of primary healthcare services in our nation.

The strategic objectives of the Ministry, in ensuring the continuous evolution of primary healthcare services delivery, is further demonstrated by our investments in our human capital, as the Ministry hosted a series of workshops, for Nurses and Physicians in primary healthcare, aimed at strengthening their delivery and quality of care through re-training in key NCD related topics.

The Ministry of Health Trinidad and Tobago, is creating a movement for healthy lifestyles called TT Moves which is gaining momentum and we believe will become an unstable force in Trinidad and Tobago. We at the helm of Public Healthcare Policy creation, will continue to base our healthcare decisions in the interests of our people to ensure the delivery of quality healthcare services, while achieving our World Health Organisation's (WHO's) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, by the year 2030.

I thank you!