



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

## Ministry of Health

OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARY

63 Park Street, Port of Spain

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Ms. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Public Administration and Appropriations Committee  
G-9 Tower D  
The International Waterfront Centre  
1A Wrightson Road  
Port of Spain

Dear Speaker

**Review of 13<sup>th</sup> Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee  
on an Examination into the Administration of Special Health Care Programmes  
in Trinidad and Tobago**

Kindly find enclosed written response to the findings and recommendations of the review of the 13<sup>th</sup> Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Administration of Special Health Care Programmes in Trinidad and Tobago. Please accept my apologies for the late response.

Sincerely

Asif Ali  
Permanent Secretary (Ag.)

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Recommendation / Comments of the

Thirteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Administration of Special Health Care Programmes in Trinidad and Tobago.

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**1. Challenges with External Patient Programme (EPP)**

**Recommendation:**

- **The Ministry of Health should embark on a public sensitization programme to educate and inform on the proper avenues to access the External Patient Programme.**

**Response:**

The Ministry of Health is presently updating its website as well as social media pages to ensure that the public is more aware of the services rendered by the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health will continue to partner with the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services on the National Caravan Project that seeks to publicize all the services offered by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GoRTT) to the citizens.

Additionally, letters have been written to the Chief Executive Officers and Chairmen of all Regional Health Authorities as a reminder to disseminate the services and update of programmes to all public health care points of contact.

- **The Ministry should submit a report to Parliament by February 15, 2019 on the programmes to be implemented, the timeline for implementation and the mechanisms to monitor and evaluate these programmes.**

**Response:**

The public sensitization programme will be implemented in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters of the fiscal year 2019 and would be monitored on a timely basis to assess the impact and the services provided.

**a. Treatment of Adult Cardiac Patient**

**Recommendation:**

- **The Ministry of Health should work with counterpart Ministries such as Education, Agriculture, Trade and Industry, Sport and Youth Affairs, Social Development and Family Services and others to embark on a public awareness campaign on NCDs within the current NCD prevention and control plan introduced in 2017.**

**Response:**

The Ministry of Health in conjunction with the Ministries of Education, Agriculture, Trade and Industry, Sport and Youth Affairs, Social Development and Family Services implemented the following activities used within the public awareness campaign on NCDs:

## 1. Childhood Obesity Prevention

### Camps/Healthy Lifestyle Camps for Children

The goal of the Childhood Obesity Prevention Camp is to identify and empower children at risk of or actually obese, develop healthy lifestyles and achieve health targets for improved well-being.

The programme targets primarily children between the ages of 7 and 13 years and the parents of children attending camp. These camps are done in collaboration with the following Ministries of Education; Agriculture; and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. The number of camps conducted since 2017 was fifteen (15).

## 2. School Health Caravan-Healthy Me

The School Health Education Caravan was developed utilizing the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Curriculum Level Two: - Module: - Eating and Fitness. The purpose is to build health skills of school children to eat healthy, live active and engage in health promoting healthy lifestyles. The School Health Caravan includes, the Implementation of the National Primary School Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyle Quiz, Health Education for Std 3 students on healthy eating active living, School Health Fairs, Health screening for school staff and Lectures and seminars for Parents and Teachers, Cafeteria Staff. These caravans are done in collaboration with the Ministries of Agriculture, Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and Education. The number of Caravans since 2017 was thirteen (13).

## 3. Civilian Conservation Corps'

The Division conducts a module on "Healthy Lifestyle" for the Induction Training Programme in seven (7) regions located in Trinidad. This programme is incorporated under the Youth Health Education Initiative: "Like Yuhself"...Live in Knowledge and Empowerment. These programmes were

done in collaboration with the Ministries of Education and Community Development. The number of cycles conducted since 2017 was four (4).

4. Caribbean Wellness Day

Caribbean Wellness Day is implemented each year to commemorate the CARICOM Heads of Government Summit on NCDs 2007. A health promotion campaign is initiated for Caribbean Wellness to raise awareness about NCDs and their risk factors and create opportunities for the population to initiate health promoting behaviors in relation to behavioral and biological risk factors including: screening and tracking key indicators of health; physical activity; healthy eating and healthy cooking, increasing, overweight & obesity.

The Caribbean Wellness Campaign activities include Free Health Screening, Nutrition and Food Demonstration and Physical Activity in the form of a 5k Fun Run. These programs were done in collaboration with the Ministries of Agriculture and Sport and Youth Affairs.

5. Healthy Communities Caravan (HCC)

Healthy Communities Caravan (HCC) is an initiative of the Health Education Division, Ministry of Health which aims to increase access to basic health screening, health education to build healthy lifestyles and creating supportive environments that empower communities to achieve optimal well-being, through their full participation. These programs were done in collaboration with the Ministries of Education; Community Development; Agriculture and Sports and Youth Affairs. The number of programs since 2017 is sixty two (62).

6. Workplace Health Promotion

The Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) Program is a settings based health promotion initiative, which promotes the health of workers by addressing the

whole organization, its people, its environment, and policies. It includes focuses on NCD prevention; management of health indicators and activities to reduce NCD risk factors in the working population. These programs were done in collaboration with the Ministries of Agriculture; Sports and Youth Affairs; Public Utilities; Education; Social Development and Family Services; Finance; and Public Administration and Communications. The number of programs since 2017 is thirty (30).

#### 7. TT Moves Campaign

In December 2018, the Ministry of Health launched the “TT Moves Campaign”, which seeks to create a culture of behavioural change including; regular physical activity through shape up Saturdays; and healthy eating through fruits Fridays and water Wednesdays.

The intention is create behavioural change among citizens on promoting physical activity and healthy eating through exciting, fun and supportive programs where people live, work, study and play. This campaign is one of the approaches to reduce the incidence of non-communicable diseases in our population.

- **A report on the attempts made by the Ministry should be submitted to Parliament by February 15, 2019.**

Response:

The information below list the attempts made by the various Ministries:

| Program                           | Target Audiences                              | Collaborating Agencies    | Programs since 2017 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Camps/Healthy Lifestyle Camps for | <i>Primary Target</i> – Children ages 7 to 13 | ✓ Ministry of Agriculture | 15                  |

| Program                           | Target Audiences                                                                                                      | Collaborating Agencies                                                                                          | Programs since 2017 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Children                          | years<br><b>Secondary Target-</b><br>Parents of children attending camp                                               | ✓ Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs<br>✓ Ministry of Education                                                |                     |
| School Health Caravan-Healthy Me  | <b>Primary Target –</b><br>Children ages 7 to13 years<br><b>Secondary Target-</b><br>Parents teachers, school workers | ✓ Ministry of Agriculture<br>✓ Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs<br>✓ Ministry of Education                   | 13                  |
| Civilian Conservation Corps’      | <b>Primary Target –</b><br>CCC trainees<br><b>Secondary Target-</b><br>CCC teachers                                   | ✓ Ministry of Education<br>✓ Ministry of Community Development                                                  | 4                   |
| Caribbean Wellness Day            | Workplaces, Communities                                                                                               | ✓ Ministry of Agriculture<br>✓ Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs                                              | 2                   |
| Healthy Communities Caravan (HCC) | Communities throughout Trinidad                                                                                       | ✓ Ministry of Community Development<br>✓ Ministry of Agriculture<br>✓ Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs<br>✓ | 62                  |

| Program                    | Target Audiences               | Collaborating Agencies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Programs since 2017 |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Workplace Health Promotion | Workplaces throughout Trinidad | ✓ Ministry of Agriculture<br>✓ Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs<br>✓ Ministry of Public Utilities<br>✓ Ministry of Education<br>✓ Ministry of People and Social Development<br>✓ Ministry of Finance<br>✓ Ministry of Public Administration and Communications | 30                  |

**b. Waiting List Initiative**

**Recommendation:**

- **The Ministry of Health should embark on a public awareness campaign to inform the public about the Waiting List Initiative. A report on this campaign must be submitted to Parliament by February 15, 2019.**

**Response:**

The Ministry of Health is presently updating its website as well as social media pages to ensure that the public is more aware of the services rendered by the Ministry of Health. The Ministry will continue to partner with the Ministry of

Public Administration on the National Caravan Project that seeks to publicize all the services offered by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GoRTT) to the citizens.

Additionally, letters have been written to the Chief Executive Officers and Chairmen of all Regional Health Authorities as a reminder to disseminate the services and update of programmes to all public health care points of contact.

- **The Ministry should assess the success of the Special Waiting List runs to determine a strategic schedule for frequent runs. A report on its findings should be submitted to the Parliament by February 15, 2019.**

**Response:**

The Ministry continues to run these programmes concurrently with the Regional Health Authorities as the demand for service currently still outweighs the ability to provide same within the Public Sector.

Internally, the Ministry of Health has written to all the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of all RHAs requesting an update on all the services provided on a quarterly basis by the Hospitals as well as their respective waiting times. This information will be used to help target specific areas of needs and funding requirements.

## **2. Reporting**

**Recommendation:**

- **The Ministry of Health should strengthen its oversight functions and its capacity to take a more proactive role in monitoring and evaluating the**

**operations of all RHA's in Trinidad and Tobago, thereby ensuring the timely submission of reports and any other relevant documentation.**

**Response:**

The Ministry of Health has developed several Committees and reporting tools that allow for oversight of the RHAs and these include:

- The Health Sector Advisory Unit, Ministry of Health provides general oversight;
- The Human Resources Committee;
- The Policy and Research Committee;
- The Finance Committee;
- The PSIP Committee;
- The Contracts Review Committee;
- The Board Minutes Committee;
- The Quality Council Committee;
- At least one member of the Ministry's staff is on the RHA's Board; and
- The submission of Monthly Financial, Utilization, PSIP and quality reports.

Most recently, greater oversight and monitoring and control have been implemented to improve the Ministry's oversight of the RHA's through the following measures:

- The Minister holds monthly meetings with the Chairman of the Board and CEOs of the RHAs to address urgent issues;
- The Permanent Secretary, Chief Medical Officer and Heads of Departments hold periodic meetings with CEOs and the RHA heads of departments to address urgent issues; and

- The Annual Services Agreement was revised and sent for final review by the RHA Boards and CEOs. This agreement should be finalized by July 2019.
- **RHA's should take the necessary steps to develop and implement internal controls and processes to ensure the timely preparation and submission of reports to the Ministry of Health and other relevant authorities. A status report on the implementation of these internal controls and processes must be submitted to the Parliament by February 15, 2019.**

**Response:**

Several steps were taken by the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) to improve the development and implementation of internal controls and processes to ensure the timely preparation and submission of reports to the Ministry of Health and these include:

- Strict adherence to the legal framework for the procurement of goods and services and special attention and focus on specification, procurement method, appointment of suitably qualified persons to the evaluation committees, timely completion of evaluation reports for submission to the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health or the respective RHA Board of Directors for approval;
- The implementation of a Staffing Review Committee, Ministry of Health comprising all Human Resource Managers of RHAs to review and standardize their respective staffing plan; the review of new positions and to allow seamless transition in the approval process with all supporting information;
- Periodic assessment meetings within the RHAs with oversight provided by the Ministry of Health through site visits in the timely reporting of the key PSIP projects including the initiatives under the hospital refurbishment and medical equipment programmes; and

- Within the RHAs, there is greater inter-departmental oversight in reporting and monitoring through a fixed reporting cycle. The reports include financial, health statistics and work programmes that is reported monthly, quarterly and annually to the Ministry of Health.

### **3. Public Awareness of Special Health Care Programmes and Services**

#### **Recommendations:**

- **The Ministry of Health should ensure that the duties of the Customer Service Representatives include educating patients and outpatients on the various special health care programmes and services.**

#### **Response:**

According to the current job description of the Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) at clinics and hospitals, the nature and scope require an officer to collect and supply pertinent information on services offered to the patient.

Through the public education campaign, the CSRs will be continuing the education of patients and outpatients on the various special health programmes and services offered by the RHA and the Ministry of Health.

### **4. HIV/AIDS**

#### **i. Prevention Programmes**

#### **Recommendation:**

- **The Ministry of Health should engage in discussions with the Ministry of Education National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) on the possibility of**

**developing prevention programmes suitable for the secondary and primary school levels. This discussion must be conducted by February 15, 2019.**

**Response:**

On 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2019 a meeting was held amongst the HIV/AIDS Coordinating Unit of the Ministry of Health; the National Parent Teachers Association(NPTA); Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA); and Student Services of the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Both the Technical Director and the Vice Chairman of the National AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC) were also in attendance. The objective of this meeting was to ascertain the current status of the prevention programmes in schools and to determine any possible gaps and identify an implementation strategy with recommendations on the way forward.

- **A status report on the outcome of the discussion with the Ministry of Education should be submitted to Parliament by March 1, 2019.**

**Response:**

The following outlines the outcomes of these discussions:-

- In 2008 an “Education Sector Policy on HIV and AIDS of the Ministry of Education” was developed and the Ministry of Education (MOE) has formulated strategies with the supporting training for the delivery of HIV/STI prevention programmes within the primary and secondary schools.

However, the prevention programmes have not been implemented mainly due to a shortage of teaching staff within the MOE.

- Some teachers have received training in HIV/AIDS through the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) curriculum, through the Bachelor's Degree Programme for primary school teachers and the Diploma in Education Programmes for secondary school teachers. However, not all trained teachers conduct HFLE sessions in their classrooms.
- Some modules of the HLFE curriculum have been implemented at the Early Childhood Care and Education Centres (ECCE).
- HIV/AIDS Coordinating Unit (MOE) falls under the purview of the Student Services Division and the guidance officers are charged with the responsibility of conducting prevention programmes in schools in the absence of the HIV/AIDS Coordinating Unit (MOE).
- The NPTA has conducted training in HIV/AIDS for its membership but they would like assistance for wider dissemination of this information to parents.
- All parties present at the meeting recognized the urgency and gave their assurance and commitment to support an implementation strategy with the current policies and procedures that exist for primary and secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.
- Both the representative of TTUTA and the representative from NPTA agreed to inform their respective organisations with regards to the progress towards the implementation strategy and delivery.

## 5. Regional Health Authorities

### **Recommendation:**

- **The Ministry of Health shall provide a status update on the implementation of the Picture Archiving and Communication System by February 15, 2019.**

### **Response:**

In February 2017, The Minister of Health wrote to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) seeking technical assistance in the implementation of a National Radiology Information System (RIS)/ Picture Archiving and Communication System (PACS). PAHO conducted a Radiology Services Assessment of the public sector from 2-6<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

Following the PAHO's Mission the key initiatives have been undertaken:

1. A National Steering Committee was convened in February 2018 with an aim to establish and standardize Radiation Safety Policies across all Regional Health Authorities, perform an inventory of existing policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in the radiology departments of the Regional Health Authorities (RHA) and establishment of metrics for reporting. The Steering Committee has:
  - a. Developed an inventory of existing RHA Standard Operating Procedures, workflows and policies;
  - b. Begun the process of formulating the Radiation Safety Policies; and
  - c. Created a RIS/PACS working group to resolve current issues with PACS in the RHA and to develop a proof of concept with two RHAs to exchange radiology images of patients that have been referred to another RHA for services. North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA)

and South-West Regional Health Authority (SWRHA) have been chosen for the proof of concept. Meetings were held with the RHAs to select the services that are to be used in the proof of concept. There have been challenges in establishing interconnectivity between the Regional Health Authorities to transfer images. The Committee will re-engage the NCRHA and SWRHA on establishing interconnectivity.

2. PAHO/WHO coordinated a Radiology Leadership Course 7-8 July 2018 to strengthen the leadership competencies in the Radiologists at the Regional Health Authorities;
3. The Ministry of Health is reviewing its bandwidth and network infrastructure and developing a plan to upgrade and replace aging infrastructure and equipment; and
4. The Ministry of Health is exploring opportunities with China to pursue a project in Radiology Telehealth to Support Diagnostic Imaging. This project aims to strengthen and improve access to health services by facilitating the timely diagnosis of disease. This will ensure universal and equitable access to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to timely, adequate and appropriate healthcare and contributing to the productive, economic and social well-being of the citizenry and country.

The Project builds on existing limited capacity of the public health system by seeking to strengthen and to optimize existing diagnostic imaging resources by applying new and advanced information and communication technologies.