

Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs

RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF

THE TWELFTH REPORT OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FIFTH SESSION (2018/2019) OF THE 11TH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

INQUIRY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE CURRENT LEVEL OF
CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND THE STATE'S INTERVENTIONS TO
PROMOTE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE AMONG CHILDREN

JANUARY 2020

MINISTRY OF THE SPORT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

MINISTERIAL RESPONSES TO THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE'S REPORT

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs (MSYA) takes the opportunity to commend the work of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Examination of the Current Level of Childhood Obesity and the State's Interventions ("the JSC Report") this being a topic of tremendous importance to the health of the youth and reducing the growing incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases in Trinidad and Tobago.

The MSYA also acknowledges the leadership role of the Ministry of Health (MOH) in the area of childhood obesity and will continue to provide support through its programme and activities for the youth. The MSYA has partnered with MOH and has also supported the development programmes of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in Sports which promote healthy lifestyles through sporting programmes in communities and schools.

OBJECTIVE 2: To assess the services and facilities available to counteract and or alleviate childhood obesity.

RESPONSES TO FINDINGS

FINDINGS:

xii. The Committee was discouraged by the ambiguity regarding the total number of schools currently with sports coaches assigned by the MSYA, and the actual level of sports participation within schools;

Ministerial Response:

Physical activity and participation in sport in schools is under the purview of the Ministry of Education (MOE) and that Ministry has the relevant structure and budgetary allocation to facilitate the same. The MSYA is currently in discussions with MOE to provide support for the development of robust sport program and the placement of coaches. The current approved number of coaches under the MSYA is only twelve (12) and these must also be used to service MSYA's community programs. Given that there are over 300 primary schools and over 200 secondary schools, the MSYA also acknowledges that the MOE is better positioned to provide accurate data on the actual level of sports participation within schools.

FINDINGS:

xiii. The numbers of participants over the past three years in the Adolescent Intervention Programme and Youth Health Caravan of the MSYA represent only a small proportion of the total school population;

Ministerial Response:

The MSYA acknowledges the fact that the number of participants in the Adolescent Intervention Programme and the Youth Health Caravan over the past three years represent a small portion of the total school population. The Ministry is currently planning to expand both initiatives in 2020 by increasing collaboration with other stakeholders in an effort to improve participation and increase the impact.

FINDINGS:

xiv. The MSYA provided a vague account of the purpose, activities and outcomes of community-based activities aimed at promoting a healthier and a more active lifestyle;

Ministerial Response:

The MSYA recognises that it plays a support role to the MOH in promoting a healthier and more active lifestyle among citizens. In this regard, community activities undertaken by the MSYA contributed to such a positive lifestyle. Specifically, over the past three years the MSYA has promoted healthier lifestyle through the community youth health caravans and the Ministry would have reached out to approximately 3,000 persons. The health caravans are geared towards promoting a healthy lifestyle amongst our youths through the dissemination of pertinent information on health and lifestyle issues. The Caravan takes the form of a health fair model and utilises a wide range of youth friendly, participatory methodologies such as games, testimonies, music, drama, spoken word, testing, edutainment and other novelty activities, to raise awareness of health issues. The intent is to empower young people to take personal responsibility for the quality and standard of their lives and become active change agents.

During the 2019 and 2020 fiscal years, the MSYA has been conducting the Life skills, Entrepreneurship, Employability, Activism and Patriotism (LEEAP) Programme which covers healthy lifestyle in its curriculum. The purpose of the LEEAP Programme is to provide training in soft skills at the community level to promote positive youth development. The outcomes of the Programme are:

- Enhanced youth leadership skills and competencies
- Development of youth advocacy skills
- Youth with a greater awareness of health, fitness and well-being
- Enhanced coping self-efficacy to better navigate stress and obstacles to goal pursuit
- Enhanced social self-efficacy in respect of interactions with other people

- Sensitization to self-employment (micro entrepreneurship) options and opportunities
- Greater youth involvement in issues of the community, that is, civic engagement.

Additionally, the MSYA has a mandate to promote total participation in sport and the Ministry supports lifelong participation in sports for everyone, not just for competition, but also for healthy living. The MSYA will facilitate this approach in communities through Sport Development Associates.

FINDINGS:

xv. Regarding the MSYA's plans to implement Youth Health Committees and Youth Health Action/Advocacy Groups within communities in the 3rd quarter of fiscal 2019, the Committee questioned the practicality of these initiatives without a clearly articulated operational framework;

Ministerial Response:

The MSYA is currently developing its proposal document for the execution of the Youth Health Caravan in 2020. The next instalment of the Caravan will include a detailed and clearly articulated operational framework for the sustainability of this initiative at the community level through the creation of Youth Health Action/Advocacy Groups, as a pilot in three communities, to be serviced and monitored by Youth Development Officers.

FINDINGS:

xx. The Committee commends the intention of the MSYA to execute a second study on the rate of youth participation in sport and physical activity in 2019/2020;

Ministerial Response:

The MSYA wishes to indicate that a second study on the rate of youth participation in sport and physical activity in schools is scheduled to commence in the second quarter of 2020 and be completed before the end of Fiscal 2019/2020. To date the terms of reference for the recruitment of the consultant are being drafted. A Project Steering Committee will provide the necessary oversight and technical advice to the project and will comprise key stakeholders such as the MOE. It is anticipated that the study will produce key insights into the levels of physical activity and sedentary living among primary and secondary students in Trinidad and Tobago. These insights will assist in the development of well targeted sport and recreation policies and programmes for schools.

RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation F:

That by February 2020, the MOE should collate data from schools to determine the total number of sports coaches that are engaged, their sports fields and the number of students engaged. Information about sports areas and schools with insufficient sports coaches should be relayed to the MSYA for assistance with recruitment;

Ministerial Response:

The data collected by the MOE will provide crucial information on the coaching needs within the school system. The MSYA would utilise such data from the MOE to inform the recruitment of sport coaches.