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Seminar on Non-Communicable Diseases and their Impact on Sustainable  
Development in the Caribbean  
Virtual meeting, 4 November 2021

**DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> This note has been issued without formal editing.

## **Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic, primarily a public health shock, has triggered significant global economic repercussions, with profound negative impacts on Caribbean economies. COVID -19 response measures – including border closures, curfews, restriction on business operations, physical distancing, and limitations on social and religious gatherings – all implemented to varying degree and on varying timetables by governments of the subregion, have resulted in continuing economic fall-out across Caribbean countries and territories.

As governments respond to the socioeconomic fallout of the pandemic, there is increasing evidence that COVID -19 disproportionately causes severe illness and death in persons with underlying health conditions that include non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer. Considering that Caribbean records one of the highest prevalence of NCDs globally, the confluence of COVID -19 and NCDs presents not just a challenge of effectively managing a public health threat, but one of safeguarding the sustainable development of the subregion.

Mortality rates show that at least half of all annual deaths in any Caribbean country result from NCDs, the highest being 83 per cent in Barbados<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the Caribbean is experiencing an increasing trend of childhood obesity<sup>3</sup> which suggests that the NCD disease burden is likely to worsen in the coming decades.

Although the Caribbean has a good history of instituting frameworks for NCD prevention and control, the most notable being the 2007 landmark “Declaration of Port-of-Spain: Uniting to Stop the Epidemic of Chronic NCDs,” there have been lapses in implementation in recent years. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed focus on NCDs and their adverse impacts, not only on health but also on economic productivity. As countries of the subregion reflect and strategize on the optimum measures to stimulate economic recovery post-pandemic, health and well-being has become an increasingly clear priority. These circumstances foster new opportunities to address NCD prevention and control in a holistic manner and provide for a space to re-engage stakeholders on the need to address the challenge of NCDs from an angle of economic sustainability rather than from the limited spectrum of individual health.

To this end, ECLAC Caribbean recently published a study on *Addressing the adverse impacts of non-communicable diseases on the sustainable development of Caribbean countries*, and produced a FOCUS magazine on *Noncommunicable Diseases and their Impact on Sustainable Development to stimulate policy debates and actions to address NCDs*. This seminar is being organized to promote further dialogue on the evidence-based policy recommendations addressed in these publications, to facilitate meaningful dialogue on the NCD challenge facing the Caribbean.

## **Rationale**

The high prevalence of NCDs in the Caribbean calls for sustained efforts to control these diseases and their risk factors. Such efforts are envisaged in several global, regional, and national frameworks to which Caribbean countries are Parties, and which exist to address the problem of NCDs, including the disease and economic burdens that they pose. With NCDs contributing the most to disability-adjusted life years globally and considering the ageing of the population and the high and rising rates of childhood obesity in the Caribbean, NCDs do not constitute merely a health challenge, they present a formidable obstacle to productivity and could put the future of Caribbean economies in jeopardy. Therefore, a discussion to highlight the economic aspect of NCDs, including the economics of their prevention and control, within the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications for sustainable development is very timely.

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<sup>2</sup> WHO (2018). Noncommunicable Diseases Country Profiles, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> See Healthy Caribbean Coalition, Childhood Obesity Factsheets (December 2019; based on WHO 2016 estimates)

## **Objectives**

The overall objective of this seminar is to examine the confounding factor of COVID -19 in relation to NCDs and to highlight the contribution that an economic analytical approach to the problem of NCDs could make towards sustainably addressing the developmental challenges posed by these chronic diseases.

## **Format**

The seminar will be held virtually during a half day period. It will begin with a formal opening ceremony that will include addresses by the Chair of the CDCC and ECLAC leadership.

Two panels consisting of four presentations each will be organized. The first panel will focus on the impact that the COVID -19 pandemic is having on NCDs, its risk factors, and persons living with these chronic conditions. The second panel will examine the utility of treating the NCD problem as a development issue requiring economic analysis, highlighting the economic burden of NCDs and identifying some economic policy options that have been widely researched.

These two panels will feature leading experts from member States, academia, the United Nations system and health-related community-based organizations.

## **Expected outputs**

The main expected output of the seminar is a set of proposed actions and recommendations for different stakeholders in sustainably addressing the challenges posed to Caribbean economies by NCDs.

## **Venue and date**

The seminar will be held virtually on 4 November 2021 from 8:30 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. Port of Spain time.

## **Participation**

The seminar will bring together ministers and senior policymakers in the field of health, finance, planning, and sustainable development, from governments of the Caribbean. Officials of the United Nations system, representatives of regional civil society organizations, academia, regional development institutions and international development partners will also be invited to participate and to contribute to the discussions, as well as ECLAC staff.

## **Geographic coverage:**

Countries of the wider Caribbean, including all Members and Associate Members of CDCC will participate. Member States of the Commission from Latin America will participate as observers.

## **Language:**

The working language of the meeting will be English.