Every year, on 31 May, WHO and partners mark World No Tobacco Day (WNTD), highlighting the health and other risks associated with tobacco use, and advocating for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption. The theme for World No Tobacco Day 2018 is “Tobacco and heart disease.”

The focus this year will be on the impact tobacco has on the cardiovascular health of people worldwide as tobacco use is an important risk factor for the development of coronary heart disease, stroke, and peripheral vascular disease.

The global tobacco epidemic kills more than 7 million people each year, of which close to 900,000 are children younger than 15 years. Nearly 80% of the more than 1 billion smokers worldwide live in low- and middle-income countries, where the burden of tobacco-related illness and death is heaviest. In Jamaica, 23% of deaths are attributed to heart disease1, and the Ministry of Health spends approximately J$22 billion on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), of which tobacco is a leading risk factor. Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) kill more people than any other cause of death worldwide, and tobacco use and second-hand smoke exposure contribute to approximately 12% of all heart disease deaths.

Tobacco use is the second leading cause of death, after diseases caused by smoking and second-hand smoke. The tobacco industry spends billions of dollars each year, around the globe on advertising, sponsorships, and other forms of promotion and to survive they must attract a new generation of tobacco users.

Studies show that tobacco marketing successfully recruits new tobacco users, maintains or increases use among current users, reduces a tobacco user’s willingness to quit, and encourages former users to start using tobacco again.

Unfortunately, despite the known harms of tobacco to heart health, the tobacco industry still spends billions of dollars advertising to children and young people in order to increase their willingness to experiment and use tobacco.

The Government of Jamaica enacted the Public Health (Tobacco Control) Regulations in 2013. This regulation included the banning of tobacco use in all public places and workplaces and the requirement for 20% graphic health warnings on packs sold in Jamaica. However, there has been no follow-up to ensure that the regulations are being enforced.

The Jamaica Coalition for Tobacco Control (JCTC) endorses this year’s WNTD theme and strongly advocates for the enactment of comprehensive tobacco control legislation which include the ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship and the enforcement of current tobacco control regulations.

The JCTC is a tobacco control advocacy group launched Friday, May 31, 2002 on WNTD. Guided by its motto “Life is too precious to go up in smoke”, the JCTC works closely with Government, health and allied organisations as well as the media to encourage abstinence and prevention of tobacco use in order to attain and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The comprehensive tobacco control legislation is a coordinated effort to establish regulatory policies and programmes, to promote and assist tobacco users to quit, and to prevent initiation of tobacco use.

Work on this legislation has already begun by the Ministry of Health and draft legislation is far advanced which will cover the articles of the FCTC not covered under the current Regulations. As such, the JCTC calls on the Government to actively and speedily pursue the enactment of comprehensive tobacco control legislation and to ensure that measures are put in place to enforce the outlawing of tobacco regulations, as this will go a far way in addressing the health and economic issues which are a threat to our national development.

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