

REMARKS
THE HONOURABLE DR. LACKRAM BODOE
MINISTER OF HEALTH
AT THE
OPENING OF THE HEARTS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT
WORKSHOP
WEDNESDAY JUNE 11, 2025
RADISSON HOTEL, PORT OF SPAIN
8:30 AM

Good Morning,

On behalf of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend a warm welcome to our regional and international guests, and a heartfelt appreciation to our local health fraternity and professionals who continue to champion the mission of improved cardiovascular health for all.

At the outset, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and by extension the World Health Organization (WHO) for their steadfast support in implementing the HEARTS initiative within our Regional Health Authorities.

The global burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) remains one of the greatest challenges facing healthcare today. Their impact

goes far beyond the health of individuals, placing strain on our social structures, economic productivity and healthcare systems. Therefore, if we do not act decisively, the consequences will be deep and enduring.

The recently published STEPS Survey highlights the significant challenges in addressing the growing burden of NCDs, which remain the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in our country. Effectively responding to this public health concern requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral and evidence-based approach.

This is why there is great pride in having successfully scaled the HEARTS Initiative to 100% of our public primary healthcare centres. This milestone is not only a triumph in service delivery; but also establishes Trinidad and Tobago as a model of excellence for the region.

Since its launch at five pilot sites in 2019, the HEARTS programme has grown substantially. By January 2020, it had expanded to 30 sites and by June 2022, all 105 health centres were onboarded, covering a catchment population of over 860,000 individuals.

Today, I am especially pleased that we are now advancing into the Quality Improvement Phase of HEARTS. This critical step focuses on enhancing both clinical and managerial processes, with the goal of improving hypertension control and strengthening cardiovascular health outcomes for all our citizens.

As of December 2024, approximately 66,000 patients, that is, 26% of hypertensive individuals in the public system, are now enrolled in the HEARTS Programme. Of these, nearly 32,000 patients have successfully achieved blood pressure control. This translates to an overall control rate of 48%, a significant improvement from 37% in 2023.

A breakdown by RHA shows tremendous progress, especially in:

- NCRHA, where 52% of enrolled patients are controlled,
- TRHA, with 51% control despite a smaller base and
- SWRHA, over 13,000 enrolled and 36% controlled.

These outcomes are more than just statistics. They are a reflection of the commitment of staff, resilience of our healthcare system and strong support of strategic partnerships particularly with PAHO, whose technical guidance has been invaluable throughout.

As we enter the Quality Improvement phase, we must now sharpen our focus on the key drivers of better hypertension outcomes:

- Accurate blood pressure measurement,
- Thorough cardiovascular risk assessment,
- Timely treatment intensification and
- Strict adherence to standardised protocols.

This workshop is a national call to action, a call to embed continuous quality improvement into the core of our primary

healthcare system. By building the capacity of our multidisciplinary teams, enhancing our monitoring systems and reinforcing leadership at every level, we are laying a strong foundation for healthier communities and longer, more fulfilling lives.

As part of its continued commitment to healthcare reform, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago intends to establish both a National Stroke Rehabilitation Centre and a National Cardiac Centre. The Stroke Centre will provide specialized care and treatment for patients in need, while the Cardiac Centre is expected to significantly reduce the current backlog for bypass surgeries, where patients currently wait between 12 to 18 months for urgent procedures.

In addition, extending the opening hours of health centres is expected to enhance support for the prevention and management of NCDs. Another key priority is the construction, equipping, and operationalization of catheterization labs at major hospitals. This will support the implementation of a nationwide 90-minute policy from heart attack to stent placement, ensuring timely and life-saving intervention.

In closing, let me reaffirm the Government's full support for the HEARTS Initiative and the important work being done here this week. The fight against cardiovascular disease and all NCDs is a

long but necessary journey. Through sustained collaboration, unwavering dedication and a relentless focus on quality improvement, we can change the health trajectory of our nation.

It is my hope that participants leave this workshop not only with new tools and strategies, but with a renewed sense of purpose to ensure that every hypertensive patient in Trinidad and Tobago receives the care, attention and support needed to live a full, healthy life.

Thank you, and I wish you a productive workshop.