

**FEATURE ADDRESS BY**  
**MINISTER OF HEALTH, THE HONOURABLE,**  
**Dr. LACKRAM BODOE**  
**Caribbean Association for Oncology and**  
**Hematology (CAOH) 2025 Scientific**  
**Conference**  
**Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2025**  
**Hyatt Regency, Port of Spain**  
**Time: 8:00 A.M.**

Good morning,

It is an honour to address you at this distinguished gathering of regional experts, advocates and practitioners committed to oncology and hematology. This conference reaffirms the Caribbean's collective will to confront one of our region's greatest health challenges, cancer.

I must take a moment to recognize and commend the Caribbean Association of Oncology and Haematology (CAOH) for fostering a supportive environment that advances cancer research, promotes medical best practices, and ensures holistic care. These efforts are essential, not just for individuals living with cancer, but also for their families and support systems.

By uniting the fields of oncology and haematology, healthcare professionals will have greater access to shared expertise, streamlined communication and multidisciplinary collaboration, allowing for more informed decision-making and holistic patient management. Furthermore, as research in one field fuels

advances in the other, practitioners will be better equipped with cutting-edge knowledge, emerging therapies and innovative tools, empowering them to deliver higher quality care and drive meaningful progress in the fight against cancer and blood disorders. As a result of shared knowledge this coordination among care teams will reduce treatment delays, improve patient outcomes and also enhance the experience for practitioners.

Beyond the policies, research and technologies, cancer is deeply personal. It is the quiet strength of a parent undergoing chemotherapy while still preparing breakfast for their children. It is the resilience of survivors who wear their scars with pride. It is the profound grief of those who have lost loved ones far too soon. It is this human face of cancer that must continue to ground our efforts and remind us that every step forward in cancer care is a step toward protecting what we hold most dear; life, family and dignity.

Cancer continues to be a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in Trinidad and Tobago. According to the 2003 – 2020 Cancer Report, over 43,380 individuals were diagnosed with cancer, 49% male and 51% female. The burden of this disease is felt most acutely in our adult population, with 97.9% of those diagnosed being over the age of 25, and 39% falling between ages 60 and 74.

We are seeing not only a rising incidence but also a concerning increase in mortality. In 2020, Trinidad and Tobago recorded its highest cancer incidence with 3,225 new cases. These numbers are not mere data points. They represent mothers, fathers, children, co-workers and neighbours. Every statistic is a story and that is what compels our national commitment.

As Minister of Health, I want to reaffirm the Government's unwavering dedication to transforming cancer care in our nation.

- Through our National Oncology Programme, we are providing free and comprehensive cancer care at key public health institutions, Port of Spain General Hospital, San Fernando General Hospital, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and the Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Centre. This includes education, screening, diagnostics, palliative services and psychosocial support.
- The National Oncology Centre at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, is nearing completion. This state-of-the-art facility will offer PET/CT imaging, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, brachytherapy and ongoing professional development opportunities. This is not just a building, it is an investment in human dignity and advanced care.
- Our commitment to evidence-based planning is strengthened by the Dr. Elizabeth Quamina Cancer Registry, a national, population-based registry established in 1994 and institutionalised in 1998. It has allowed us to standardise our surveillance and align with international frameworks such as the IARC and GICR.
- The Registry reports that breast, prostate, colorectal and uterine cancers remain the most commonly diagnosed. Individuals of African descent accounted for 36.2% of all cases, followed by individuals of East Indian descent at 23%, a figure consistent with our nation's diverse demographic profile.
- The Registry is further strengthened by partnerships with the North Central RHA, Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society and Civil Society Organisation. Although cancer notification is not mandatory by law, our dedicated Registry Officers ensure that data from both public and private

institutions is collected and verified for accuracy and completeness.

- We are also integrating the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines within our local context, ensuring that treatment protocols remain internationally aligned but regionally relevant.

As we look to the future, our priorities are clear:

- Operationalise the National Oncology Centre to ensure access across all geographic and socio-economic lines.
- Expand early detection and screening, particularly in underserved and rural communities where late-stage diagnoses remain prevalent.
- Train and empower our healthcare workforce in oncology nursing, radiotherapy, pathology, palliative care and data analytics.
- Leverage digital innovation, including patient navigation tools, AI-supported diagnostics and electronic health records, to improve treatment timelines and continuity of care.
- Strengthen public awareness campaigns around risk factors, particularly for the working-age population, where modifiable behaviours such as diet, smoking, and physical inactivity can significantly alter outcomes.

Colleagues, with over 53.8% of our population under the age of 35, we must act decisively. The choices we make today will determine the cancer landscape of tomorrow. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that a young and vibrant Trinidad and Tobago is also a healthy one.

In closing, I extend my deep appreciation to the Caribbean Association for Oncology and Hematology, the Dr. Elizabeth Quamina Cancer Registry staff, our Regional Health Authorities, civil society partners and international agencies like PAHO, CARPHA, International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Inter-American Development Bank, who have stood with us in this vital mission.

The battle against cancer is long, but it is not hopeless. Through compassion, science and collective resolve, we are building a system that not only treats cancer but prevents it, detects it early and supports every patient on their journey.

Let us continue the work together and without delay.