

**Remarks by the Honourable Dr. Lackram Bodoie
Minister of Ministry of Health**

Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association's Hope Gala

Friday July 25, 2025

Dennis P. Ramdhan Complex, Couva

7:30 pm

Good evening,

It is a great honour to be with you tonight at this meaningful occasion. Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association for its continued leadership in advancing healthcare and medical advocacy across Trinidad and Tobago. Tonight's gala is not only a celebration, but a demonstration of purpose of what can happen when caring professionals, committed organizations, and a concerned society unite in support of our most vulnerable citizens: our children with special needs.

The Ministry of Health is proud to support initiatives like these, which go beyond the clinical setting to bring healing through inclusion, compassion, and infrastructure. Events such as the Hope Gala align deeply with the government's ongoing mission to

create a health system that is equitable, inclusive and people-centered.

I have learned that the funds raised tonight will contribute to the development of a sensory-friendly playground at the Strategic Learning and Special Education Institute, a space that will offer joy, therapy and belonging to children who often face an uphill battle simply to feel seen and supported. This initiative is both timely and transformative.

Children on the autism spectrum often face heightened or diminished sensory responses that make everyday environments challenging. However, through sensory play, they can begin to understand, regulate and enjoy the world around them. Research confirms that sensory play can significantly:

- Support sensory integration, helping the brain process sensory input more efficiently;
- Improve communication and social interaction, particularly in non-verbal children;
- Enhance motor skills, from fine hand movements to gross physical coordination;
- Foster emotional regulation, helping to reduce anxiety and meltdowns ;
- And build independence and cognitive flexibility, through exploration and problem-solving

As Minister of Health, I wish to emphasize my Ministry's ongoing commitment to improving support systems for children with special needs. This is echoed in our legislative framework through the Children's Life Fund Act, which ensures that children facing life-limiting illnesses have access to life-saving care, regardless of economic status. Since its inception, the Fund has been a beacon of hope for hundreds of families and its work continues to be a source of national pride.

Additionally, there are other partnerships with various Ministries such as the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services, which are being explored to supplement and enhance much needed support services for both these children and their caregivers. However, the Government welcomes the opportunity to form bonds with the relevant stakeholders.

Tonight's initiative is a testament to the power of public-private partnership and community engagement. Whether you are a donor, a sponsor, a parent or a medical professional, your presence here sends a powerful message that we are willing to invest in the lives and futures of our children.

Let us continue to build bridges across sectors and disciplines, creating an ecosystem of care where no child is left behind,

where every child, regardless of ability, is given the chance to thrive.

To the organizers, supporters, and attendees thank you. Thank you for embodying the spirit of service. Thank you for choosing hope.

May tonight inspire not only generosity, but also a renewed sense of responsibility as we journey together toward a more inclusive and compassionate Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.