

FEATURE ADDRESS BY
MINISTER OF HEALTH, THE HONOURABLE,
Dr. LACKRAM BODOE
World Breastfeeding Week 2025 Annual Walk
and Breakfast
Bishops Anstey, High School, Port of Spain
SATURDAY 26th JULY, 2025
Time: 7:30 A.M.

Good morning everyone,

It is an honour to join with you all here today as we celebrate World Breastfeeding Week 2025.

Let me begin by expressing heartfelt thanks to the Breastfeeding Association of Trinidad and Tobago (TBATT) for once again leading this important national observance. For over three decades, this annual celebration has reminded us of the important role breastfeeding plays in building a healthier future for our nation, starting from the very first days of life.

Breastfeeding is not only the cornerstone of a child's survival and development, but it is also a cost-effective public health intervention that protects both infants and mothers from a wide range of health conditions. Today's event is not just symbolic of

the steps we must take together to protect breastfeeding, but a meaningful way to unite communities in health, empowerment and support.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, we continue to see positive shifts in public attitudes toward breastfeeding, but we know there is more to do. We encourage all mothers to make breastfeeding a priority, not only because it provides the best nutritional start in life for babies, but because it also strengthens the bond between mother and child.

Breastfeeding also helps in reducing the risk of childhood infections, supports cognitive development and lowers the risk of chronic diseases later in life. By choosing to breastfeed and seeking support when needed, mothers play an important role in shaping a healthier generation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend The Breast Feeding Association of Trinidad and Tobago (TBATT) for its unwavering commitment to breastfeeding support over the past 48 years. You have served as true champions for mothers and babies across the country, offering guidance regardless of the time of day or night. Your vigilance in countering aggressive marketing by formula companies and standing firm as the region's only Watchdog group, particularly in supporting the 78th World Health Assembly Resolution against Digital Marketing, is highly commendable.

I must also recognise Ms. Debra Thomas, Manager of the National Breastfeeding Coordinating Unit, for her continued leadership, vision and steadfast contributions to the national breastfeeding movement. Thank you, Ms. Thomas, for being a tireless advocate for breastfeeding mothers and for ensuring that the Ministry's mandate to protect, promote and support breastfeeding remains strong and visible.

It is also timely to point out the achievement of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) accreditation at four of our major healthcare institutions, Sangre Grande Hospital, Point Fortin Hospital, Mt. Hope Women's Hospital and Scarborough General Hospital. Several of our practices were changed to accommodate the Mother Friendly Care and Respectful Maternity and Newborn care in tandem with the BFHI implementation. Support persons are included in the birthing process and women in labour can now be seen utilising modern techniques such as birthing tools to aid in delivery. Fathers can be present to bond with their babies at birth, even while the mother is still in surgery or the labour room.

This accreditation, aligned with global standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, is a powerful signal of

our commitment to women, children and families across Trinidad and Tobago.

Being designated as a Baby-Friendly Hospital means our hospitals have implemented the “Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding.” It ensures that mothers are given the right support and information to initiate and sustain breastfeeding, especially during those crucial early moments after birth. It means that our hospitals are now better environments for mother-baby bonding, exclusive breastfeeding and healthier outcomes.

We are cognizant of the fact that the vulnerable population of preterm infants need special care. This month we collaborated with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) to train 25 of our health care professionals in the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative for small, sick and preterm new-borns. Ongoing training will now ensue for all staff assigned to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at all of our hospitals. This is to ensure that preterm infants will be given the best nutritional choice available to them.

In the not too instant future, we intend to continue to develop the first Human Breast Milk Bank in our country. This means that mothers who cannot breastfeed, as well as pre-term and sick infants can benefit from this initiative.

But beyond policy and accreditation, this achievement represents a promise, a promise to every mother in this country

that she is seen, supported and empowered. It says to every family that we are here to walk with you on this journey.

Our work, however, does not stop here. We must continue to invest in sustainable support systems, through public education, workplace policies and healthcare provider training, so that breastfeeding is not only encouraged but embraced at every level of society. We are still working on improvement of our Exclusive Breastfeeding Rates and commit to working assiduously towards achieving the 2030 Global goal of 70% Exclusive Breastfeeding Rates.

We applaud the contributions that your organisation has made and continue to do. We are thankful to the dedicated counsellors who assist mothers and their babies on the most crucial days. Your contributions have not gone unnoticed by the Ministry of Health and by the society at large. We urge you though to make a gallant effort to recruit more foot soldiers to aid our mothers as they return home. Your service is invaluable.

As the only Watchdog group in this region you have stood up to the goliaths in the formula industry, putting pen to paper even in the face of adversity. We are grateful for the opportunity that was given to us to support the 78th World Health Assembly Resolution against Digital Marketing. We stand together in protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding in our communities.

Today, as we walk through the streets of Port of Spain, let us walk with purpose. Let us walk in solidarity with mothers. Let us walk for healthier babies, stronger families and a brighter, more nurturing future for all.

Thank you, and I look forward to enjoying this morning with all of you.