

## **IHRP Fellowship Final Summer Report**

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This summer I had the pleasure of working with the health policy team at the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) in Port of Spain, Trinidad. CARPHA is the principal regional health institute for the Caribbean, serving 24 member states. CARPHA's focus spans across many spheres of public health including: diseases and conditions, food and nutrition, family and community health, mental health, quality assurance, and environmental health. CARPHA works within the framework of international public health agencies, supported by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

My primary project focused on researching how legislation can be used to reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), increase quality of life, and ultimately save lives. NCDs are diseases like cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. They are the leading cause of morbidity and premature mortality in the Americas - 75% of all deaths are associated with NCDs. The incidence of these diseases has increased enormously over the past twenty years and continues to rise rapidly. Poorer countries are disproportionately affected by NCDs - residents are 65% to 85% more likely to die from NCDs compared to those living in high-income countries. The current rise in NCDs serves to widen the health gap and slow economic growth in the developing world (1).

The recent and drastic rise of NCDs can be attributed to a number of factors including; the promotion of unhealthy food products, the high comparative cost of healthy food, the marginalization of traditional diets, lack of education, and rapid urbanization (1). As a problem rooted in human behaviour, the law serves as a highly effective tool to stem the spread of disease and reverse the global trend. Regulation can be used as an achievable and highly cost-effective measure to address the four shared risk factors: harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and tobacco use.

Over the course of my internship, I researched many topics pertaining to the application of law to control these factors. For example, I researched the mandatory reformulation of processed foods currently being implemented by many countries around the world to determine the feasibility of implementing similar measures in the Caribbean. I also researched whether existing legislation could provide the legal force needed to implement stronger regulatory measures. Through my research, I strove to provide a human rights-based perspective to the fight against non-communicable diseases. My final presentation drew from the body of literature on international human rights and bioethics to explore what legal interventions may be justified from a right to health perspective

My second project was to provide research support and advice for the launch of the Caribbean Regulatory System (CRS). The goal of the CRS is to provide access to safe, efficacious, and affordable medicines and health technologies in all Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member states. Currently, due to limited resources, many of the small Caribbean nations lack a regulatory

system for the registration, licensing, and market surveillance of pharmaceutical products. This vacuum puts all citizens at risk of not having access to safe and essential medicines. Once launched, the CRS will rely on established national regulatory authorities to act as a reference for the premarket evaluation of medicines. This approach is highly cost- and resource- efficient and will benefit the citizens of the Caribbean almost immediately. One of my specific tasks has been to research the existing regulatory frameworks of each Caribbean country (where they exist) in order to smooth the transition to the regionalized system, avoid past mistakes, and incorporate aspects that have been shown to be effective in the region.

I also had the opportunity to attend a workshop on Health Law: Implementing Fiscal and Regulatory Policies to Prevent Obesity in Children and Adolescents in English-Speaking Caribbean Countries hosted by the Pan American Health Organization at their Caribbean headquarters in Bridgetown, Barbados. Attendees at this meeting were representatives from government, CARICOM, civil society and academia. The goal of this meeting was to discuss and create country-level plans for the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of fiscal policies and marketing and labeling regulation for the prevention of overweight and obesity with specific targets and milestones. At this meeting, I was able to engage with policy experts and observe firsthand how health research is turned into law.

Overall, this internship has been an amazing experience. It was a privilege to have had the opportunity to conduct meaningful research that will hopefully become law in the Caribbean. Furthermore, I learned much simply by interacting with experts in public health on a daily basis. The dedication to promoting the health and wellbeing of the people of the Caribbean shown by the CARPHA staff was admirable. Thank you to the International Human Rights Program for making this possible!



The attendees at the *Workshop on Health Law: Implementing Fiscal and Regulatory Policies to Prevent Obesity in Children and Adolescents in English-Speaking Caribbean Countries* held on 20-22 July, 2016 at the Pan American Health Organization in Bridgetown, Barbados.

Further reading:

- (1) Pan American Health Organization. *Noncommunicable Disease Risk Factors in the Americas: Considerations on the Strengthening of Regulatory Capacity*. REGULA Technical Reference Document. Washington, DC: PAHO, 2015.