



Ministerial Statement
To the House of Assembly

By

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Chronic Disease Risk Factor Survey - STEPS to a Well Bermuda

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Mr. Speaker,

I rise this morning to provide the Members of this Honorable House and the public with an update on an exciting undertaking within the Ministry of Health and Seniors.

The Ministry is very excited to announce that the chronic disease risk factor survey, STEPS to a Well Bermuda, is underway. As of November 6th the intensive training for nearly 60 interviewers for the STEPS to a Well Bermuda survey concluded and the interviewers are now in the field conducting the survey.

Mr. Speaker, and honorable members, you will recall that the STEPS to a Well Bermuda survey is a standardized tool created by the World Health Organization (WHO) and used worldwide in over 100 countries to determine the prevalence of chronic disease risk factors in the population. STEPS is actually the abbreviation

for "Stepwise approach to chronic risk factor surveillance." The STEPS survey is so important because, the WHO points out; the risk factors of today are the diseases of tomorrow.

Therefore, it behooves us to accurately assess the prevalence of important chronic disease risk factors in the Bermuda population. The STEPS tool will identify the prevalence of risk factors such as elevated blood glucose levels, raised blood pressure, overweight and obesity, tobacco and alcohol use and sedentary lifestyles.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, these are important risk factors for developing diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, among other chronic diseases. This information will allow us to estimate the burden of chronic disease on our society in the years ahead and most importantly to plan population-based interventions to mitigate the harmful impact of these diseases.

Mr. Speaker, self-reported surveys conducted in the past estimated the prevalence of diabetes in Bermuda to be the highest of all 30 OECD countries. In the 2011 publication, *Health in Review*, Bermuda was noted to have a diabetes prevalence more than twice the OECD average. Yet as concerning as this fact is, we may find out that many more than the reported 13% of adults actually have diabetes or are at risk for developing it. We need this information to prepare the health system.

The STEPS to a Well Bermuda survey will actually take physical and biochemical measurements of the surveyed population so that we have an accurate reflection of the prevalence of this expensive and disabling disease. With this information we can plan targeted interventions for those at greatest risk.

Just as important as disease prevalence is Bermuda's rate of complications for these chronic diseases. Complications of diabetes such as chronic kidney disease, amputations and blindness are a tremendous burden on the individual and on the society. In the area of chronic disease complications, our island also fares poorly, particularly given the annual expenditure on health care in these areas.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that Bermuda's rate of kidney failure requiring dialysis or transplantation has steadily increased in the past decade and is among the highest of the OECD countries, exceeded only by Japan and the USA. Likewise, the island's diabetes lower extremity amputations rated the highest among OECD countries.

Mr. Speaker, the case for why we need information on chronic disease risk factors is clear. So allow me to share just a few more details about the STEPS to a Well Bermuda survey so that the members of this Honorable House and the public can share in the excitement of this historic undertaking.

The STEPS survey tool we are using in Bermuda is the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) version. It has been appropriately tailored to this region of the world, and was further refined for Bermuda by the team in the Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit of the Department of Health, in collaboration with the experts at the Caribbean Public Health Agency (known as CARPHA).

One of the more exciting features of this undertaking is the broad collaboration with local health partners. The Department of Health is being joined by the Bermuda Hospitals Board's Chronic Disease Management Centre, the Bermuda Diabetes Association, Bermuda Heart Foundation & CORE, and Bermuda Cancer

and Health. Argus Insurance Company has been an industry leader in supporting the STEPS process by providing their spacious accommodations for the series of trainings that were required. And other insurers have confirmed their support for the survey project.

Mr. Speaker, In addition to the local collaborators, the Ministry of Health and Seniors has been assured of the ongoing support of PAHO, CARPHA and the University of the West Indies, Barbados. STEPS to a Well Bermuda is a great example of public health partners collaborating to identify and solve health problems.

In the first week of October, two CARPHA consultants visited Bermuda to train the STEPS team. Over 90 volunteers were trained, including STEPS interviewers and 30 health care professionals who will volunteer to conduct the biochemical measurements for STEP 3 on over 2600 Bermuda residents.

The STEPS protocol is simple, consisting of 3 STEPS. STEPS 1 and 2 are performed in the homes of the participants and consist of a detailed interview on lifestyle and health matters as well as physical measurements: blood pressure, weight, height, waist circumference and calculation of Body Mass Index (BMI).

These two STEPS are followed at a later date by STEP 3 which takes place in a clinical setting and involves a simple fasting finger stick blood test for glucose (blood sugar) and cholesterol. Bermuda has been fortunate to be able to expand the survey to include a STEP 4a, which is an oral health assessment and STEP 4b, an objective measure of physical activity in the randomly selected participants.

Two thousand six hundred fifty-six households were randomly selected with the assistance of the Department of Statistics, another one of our collaborators in the study. We thank them and the Department of Land Surveys and Registration for providing the mapping of the island to be used by the interviewers in going from house to house.

All Bermuda residents of age 18 and above were eligible to be selected. All selected households will be asked to partake in STEPS 1 to 3, but a much smaller sub-sample of households will be selected for the expanded steps, 4a and 4b.

Mr. Speaker, The Ministry of Health and Seniors is very hopeful that the selected households will each welcome the STEPS interviewers and will provide them with accurate information. Complete and accurate information will not only benefit the island but will directly benefit the individual participants. The STEPS survey essentially offers a free health screening for participants and these results will be provided to each individual to share with their personal health care provider.

The volunteers for the pilot testing held at St Paul's AME Church and Devonshire Seventh Day Adventist Church on November 2nd and 3rd confirmed that the survey it is a positive experience. We thank the churches and their congregation for their support.

Given the benefit of the STEPS survey to each participant and to the body of health information in Bermuda, we are very excited to witness this process and I am confident that all the members of this Honorable House will join me in wishing STEPS to a Well Bermuda success as it unfolds in the community.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, I would take it a step further and suggest that each of us should have our fingers crossed that our household is selected to participate in the STEPS to a Well Bermuda survey. It would be a big step in the right direction for our health.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.