



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Health and Environment

**Ministerial Statement to the
House of Assembly
by the Minister of Health, Seniors and Environment
The Honourable Jeanne J. Atherden, JP, MP
On 18th July, 2014**

**"CARIBBEAN UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES MINISTERS OF HEALTH
MEETING"**

Mr. Speaker,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Honourable House with a brief report on my attendance at a meeting of the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories Ministers of Health which was organized by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) at their headquarters in Washington, DC on the 7th and 8th July, 2014.

The invitation from PAHO included the cost of travel and lodging for me and one Officer. I was pleased to attend and was accompanied by the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Cheryl Peek-Ball, and my Permanent Secretary, Mr. Kevin Monkman.

Mr. Speaker,

It was gratifying to have the opportunity to meet the Ministers of Health from all of the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories. This was the first time since 2008 that the Ministers had been provided the opportunity to gather to share the challenges and successes that are faced in each of our island homes.

As well as Bermuda, Ministers from Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands attended along with their technical officers. In

addition, representatives from Public Health England and the British Embassy in Washington, DC took part. The three PAHO Country Representatives who work closely with the Territories were also present and assisted with arranging private meetings with the PAHO Director, Dr. Carissa Etienne.

Mr. Speaker,

This was my first visit to PAHO Headquarters, so I appreciated the opportunity to learn more about PAHO's history and role, its organizational structure and the PAHO Strategic Plan for 2014 through 2019.

Over the course of the two days, we had in depth presentations and discussions on such varied topics as:

- The role that Public Health England can play in providing assistance and advice to the UK Overseas Territories;
- Communicable diseases and health analysis;
- Non-Communicable diseases and risk factors;
- Determinants of health and promoting health through the life course;
- Health systems;
- Preparedness, surveillance and response; and
- Common priorities, health issues and needs across the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories.

Mr. Speaker,

As I indicated, we had the opportunity to meet with the Director of PAHO to provide her with insights into the health challenges facing Bermuda. As you can imagine, the cost of health care and the debilitating impact that non-communicable diseases are having on our health outcomes were at the top of our list.

Not surprisingly, these issues were at the top of almost all of the other islands' lists of issues as well. In addition to meeting with the Director, we had the opportunity to discuss ways in which

Bermuda could take advantage of PAHO's purchasing power to acquire medications at significantly lower costs.

The Department of Health already takes advantage of PAHO's "Revolving Fund" to purchase vaccines for Bermuda. The Revolving Fund has been used for a number of years and ensures that vaccines are received from reputable producers and that the products are delivered to Bermuda under the appropriate, temperature controlled conditions.

PAHO is also expanding the list of medications which it makes available through its "Strategic Fund". These non-vaccine drugs cover a range of uses including anti retrovirals, drugs for non-communicable diseases as well as oncology/chemotherapy drugs. We are sharing the information gathered with both the Bermuda Hospitals Board and the Department of Health so that they can ask PAHO to bid on their medication orders.

Mr. Speaker,

All of the PAHO Member States contribute to the ranking of health priority issues across the region, and I was struck by the number of islands that had similar priorities. Collectively, five of the six Overseas Territories listed their priorities as:

- Non-communicable diseases (NCO's) and risk factors - countries faced challenges with developing plans for tackling NCO's, producing evidence based guidelines and access to medications for controlling NCO's such as diabetes and high blood pressure;
- Health governance and financing - again, the development of comprehensive national strategies, policies and plans were identified as challenges;
- HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections were a common theme, but Bermuda has had considerable success in tacking this communicable disease issue; and
- Mental Health and substance use and abuse disorders were raised as particular issues - especially as they contribute to the premature deaths of young people through violence and road traffic collisions.

Finally, challenges with implementing health systems, gathering health information and producing evidence based recommendations were cited as common issues - not just in the Overseas Territories but in other Caribbean islands.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me conclude by thanking PAHO for organizing this important meeting which will lead to greater communication and cooperation among the Caribbean Overseas Territories. We share similar health challenges, and there is no reason that we cannot also share our solutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.