



Office of the  
**Prime Minister**

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS FOR THE WELLNESS UNIT & “YOUR WELLNESS MATTERS” CAMPAIGN LAUNCH**

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**HON. PHILIP DAVIS, KC, MP**  
**PRIME MINISTER OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

**THURSDAY 23RD MARCH 2023**

Good morning,

The Bahamas has many treasures, but our people are our greatest treasure. The Bahamian people are the strength and wealth of our nation.

However, we can only be strong if we are healthy. We cannot realise the fullness of our great potential if we do not invest in our health. When I speak of health, I mean our physical health, mental and emotional health, and our spiritual health.

The launch of the **“Your Wellness Matters” Campaign** signals to every Bahamian that we are serious about improving health, and therefore improving lives. Launching this campaign in 2023 is especially significant, as we prepare to celebrate a major milestone in our nation’s history. At this moment, on the cusp of our 50th independence anniversary, there are many things our nation can boast of. We have developed from a tiny colony to a growing powerhouse in the region. Many of our nation’s daughters and sons have achieved great things both at home and worldwide. We have much to be proud of. Five decades of hard work, grit, and determination have brought us to where we are today. However, like any other growing nation we have our challenges. We are faced with a nationwide health crisis that we must address – and it’s no exaggeration to say that many Bahamian lives depend on it.

According to the World Population Review, Spain is the world’s healthiest country and there are several factors that have led to this achievement. Diet, activity levels, and a successful universal healthcare system, which has lowered the country’s rate of preventable deaths. The Bahamas ranks 167<sup>th</sup> on the same index. Clearly there is considerable room for improvement.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness will use **“Your Wellness Campaign”** as one of the key drivers to help Bahamians make changes to their lives for better health. These will include programmes to:

- facilitate and encourage more active lifestyles;

- educate on mental health strategies and destigmatize seeking therapy;
- provide wellness activities in each community on each island;
- and engage school children at all grade levels through specific programmes tailored for their age groups.

We will partner with the public and private sector, including the University of The Bahamas, various local churches, community groups and NGOs. We want this message to reach as many Bahamians as possible. Too many of us have suffered due to diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Not all disease is avoidable. But we can reduce the incidence and perhaps severity of disease by making important changes to our lifestyle.

We must also change cultural attitudes toward mental illness. There are many Bahamians living with (and too often suffering from) anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems, and they deserve compassion and effective treatment. A change in how our country approaches mental health is long overdue.

The new Wellness Unit will continue to use Bahamian data to drive its initiatives, and each programme will have measurable outcomes so that we are able to track progress, ensuring that the Unit can map a clear direction each year.

Now, as many of us know all too well, keeping a healthier diet can be more expensive than an unhealthy one. Ramen noodles are cheaper than fresh vegetables. A can of soda can be cheaper than a bottle of water. Chips and cookies are often more affordable than fruit. Unhealthy calories, from fast food and junk food, are too often the cheapest option. If we are going to urge people to eat healthy, it's on us to make sure nutritious food becomes affordable for everyone. We're taking the following steps:

- Exploring different tax structures for fruits and vegetables vs sugary and processed foods;
- Better marketing and support for BAIC and BAMSI to ensure greater access to healthy, seasonal produce;
- and encouraging and supporting community farming, especially in communities where affordable, nutrient-filled choices are currently in short supply.

The issue of resources applies to mental and emotional health as well. The truth is that some Bahamians simply don't have access to education about mental health disorders, or information about how to access professional care. While we work to offer education and to destigmatize mental health issues, we also want to create equitable access to mental health care and support, including:

- Providing free mental health clinics;
- Providing free therapy sessions; and
- Establishing a Mental Health Hotline for 24-hour support.

I hope the inclusiveness of our vision is apparent to all.

The goal of this Wellness campaign is to have all Bahamians, from every walk of life, understand that their health matters, and to give all of our people a real opportunity to improve their lives.

I want the Minister of Health and his team to know that he has the full support of the Government, as we launch **"Your Health Matters"** today. I sincerely hope that this launch ignites a true desire for change, as The Wellness Unit takes on the awesome task of creating a healthier, happier nation.

Thank you.