

Vision For Health Care in Barbados
Honourable Mia Amor Mottley Q.C., M.P.
Leader of the Opposition

Salutations

I am thrilled to be here tonight! Thank you for your invitation to address this august gathering.

I am particularly humbled for two major reasons.

First, this ceremony celebrates excellence and one always likes to be associated with quality and high standards. Secondly, this is the first time in my near 30 years of public life that I have ever addressed a gathering of health professionals. I therefore consider this a privilege and an honour.

As I sat here watching these talented young people being awarded for their success, I became deeply aware that some of them may be the very ones whom I may have to pay a personal visit in the next few years given that the job I am asking the people of Barbados for is one with a near 50 per cent mortality rate.

That is right. Of the seven Prime Ministers we have had in our 50 years, three have succumbed while in office. This is a reality I cannot ignore and a clear reminder of human frailty. But, it emphasizes for me at a very personal level the need and importance of quality healthcare and taking personal responsibility for one's health.

My role tonight is not to discuss my own health demons – I've managed to get on top of diet and exercise but still wrestling with the smoking – it is to discuss our vision for the health sector in Barbados. We believe that Barbados is going in the wrong direction. We believe that things can get better. We believe that fresh thinking is needed to put us on the right path.

And frankly, the Barbados Labour Party cannot conceive of rebuilding this country to make it work again for all Barbadians without treating to the issues of health and wellness as a national priority that should once again engage the highest level of leadership. We see health as more than just about curative interventions and medical conditions. It is about addressing the social and economic conditions which make people ill in the first place. We do want to only treat people in the Hospital but to keep them out of any Hospital!

The reality is our last seven years of economic decline has significantly increased inequality, and in healthcare this is most evident. The fact is that prior to this economic crisis more Barbadians were looking after their health out of their own pockets. Many preferred to attend private doctors because of the reduced waiting time and the privacy of attention.

In the last five years, there has been a marked shift from the private sector to the public – or some may even say a shove, if you consider the supposed reform of the Barbados Drug Service under this Government. Many of you know this better than I do.

You know too that too many people are avoiding routine medical checks and preventative care and are only seeking medical treatment at a much too late or urgent stage.

The statistics bear this out. In the public sector, in the major chronic disease categories, visits moved from 80,104 in 2010 to 86,528 in 2011 – an increase of almost 6 500 visits in 1 year after the Drug Service Reforms.

What has become clear from this action are the inequalities in this society – what some people call two Barbadoses.

For us reducing inequality and addressing disparity in health outcomes is not just a matter of improving health care delivery; it is a fundamental matter of social justice.

To quote Professor Michael Marmot who has led research internationally on the impact of inequity and social exclusion on health outcomes, **“the unnecessary disease and suffering of disadvantaged people, whether in poor countries or rich, is a result of the way that we organize our affairs in society”**.

Ladies and gentlemen, how we organize our affairs in Barbados, and how we prioritize decisions is the essence of sound decision making in the interests of our people. The evidence in recent years establishes the case clearly.

- The Government of Barbados is now spending \$7.60 on health care in each \$100 that it spends. In 1990, Government was spending \$15.40,

and if you say that is too far back, in 2007 the spending was \$12.40 for every \$100 it spent. So today when people have less money in their pockets and have been drawing down on their savings to cope with day-to-day living, our Government is spending less on health care.

- In an attempt to reform the Barbados Drug Service, Government made a decision in late 2010 that a processing fee would be levied on each drug on a prescription issued by a private doctor. Prescriptions from the private sector dropped from 1,003,035 in 2011 to 887,249 in 2014. Conversely, over the same period in the public sector prescriptions spiked from 924,461 to 1,142,913.
- The first cut in fiscal adjustment in 2013 was to send home the people employed to keep Barbados clean through debushing. The country was hit with a dengue and chikungunya outbreak thereafter. This action was penny wise and pound foolish because we all know where mosquitoes breed prolifically.

So Government's duty is to make choices, and, as we know, each choice has consequences.

But let us be frank. Even if as a Government, we took all the right policy decisions and made all of the right investments, that of itself would not allow us to successfully address the key challenge of Barbadians being healthy and well. I believe that a Government must partner with you as a key ally in helping Barbadians to take greater responsibility for their well-being. We face two national development challenges: CNCDs and the Aging Population.

Too many Barbadians are suffering from CNCDs. We set up the NCD Commission before we left office in 2007 and it played a critical role in the articulation of the Port of Spain Declaration. So we understand what needs to be done but we need to partner with you to encourage early and more comprehensive testing of our people. People listen to their doctors. You will be the most persuasive voice in this battle. We can facilitate as a national exercise expanded testing and screening. There are 6 basic tests which we must ensure that everyone, regardless of income levels, at the appropriate age and intervals, must take. These are

- Blood Sugar
- Kidney Function
- Cholesterol
- Mammograms and Pap Smears
- Prostate Examinations
- Colonoscopies

It is too easy for us to put in this place together.

In addition, we must encourage healthy eating and create policies which promote exercise and recreation. Our job is also to make it affordable and your job is to help make it happen. We must incentivize more local production to bring down the prices of fruit, vegetables, and make them more affordable. We must address obesity in children starting with our School Meals Department and prioritizing physical education.

We also need a new strategic focus on address the Aging Population. This will involve prioritization of the development of a Population Strategy which addresses the need to increase birth rates, promote independent aging, and

ensure the solvency of NIS. For the first time 2014/2015 our rate of population growth has declined for two straight years. Too many elderly Barbadians are struggling to survive. More elderly Barbadians are living alone and without the necessary family support that existed years before. We have to expand the alternative care of the elderly program but we must also facilitate investments with NGOs like BARP and the Soroptomists, Barbadian entrepreneurs and Insurance Companies to have modern assisted living housing or facilities in every parish. We need to completely rethink aging and focus on providing more independence and autonomy in environments where their dignity is preserved.

In terms of governance, we must ask the question whether we are satisfied with the current governance arrangements in the health sector.

For too many of you, navigating chaos has become a new professional aptitude. We KNOW that you are trying to give of your very best in circumstances that leave much to be desired. We know that for some of you morale is low and you are frustrated with your daily struggle to provide quality care in some of our facilities but we need you to develop a sense of optimism that together we can rebuild this sector again. We wish to consult with you on the role of the state in the health sector. Which are the services, such as public health, primary health care and Accident and Emergency that are fundamental to be state led and delivered? We want to hear from you if the role of the Ministry of Health and Wellness as a Barbados Labour Party administration will designate it, should transition to a stronger focus on regulation, enforcement, facilitation, purchasing of services and less so on managing complex institutions.

We need to deepen the level of consultation with you on the best way to improve our financing of health care to ensure its sustainability given our recent experience.

With so many Barbadians paying out of their pocket, the unpredictability of what health challenges they may face drives much anxiety. The risk for the pauperization of families is just too high if there is a major medical event. Government's rhetoric has not been matched by the reality of funds given to the sector. I have already given the figures. And I dare say, we do not believe there is any sustainability in the National Corporate Social Responsibility Levy. It is unlikely to yield what is projected and it is not ring fenced for use by the health sector.

We must settle on a system, therefore, that improves the financial protection of our people through Risks Pooling. In this regard, we owe it to ourselves to investigate the benefits of enlarging the Pool in a cooperative manner within CARICOM where many countries face similar challenges. Simply put, the larger the pool the more efficient it will be in sharing the collective risks and driving down costs.

So whatever the mix we settle on - continued State-led Funding, Social Insurance and Voluntary Private Insurance, we must reduce the level of Out of Pocket Spend of our people. We must not carbon copy international financing models, we have to ensure that that the system meets our peculiar needs, our size and our culture. There are many other considerations to take into account. Can we negotiate collectively with others in CARICOM on the procurement of

key drugs and equipment to drive down costs? Do we follow Population Health Management to ensure that wellness of our population is our ultimate aim? Do we incentivize those who take responsibility for their wellness (just as the motor industry does with No Claim Bonuses)? We believe that the discussions have to be far wider than they have been thus far.

But whatever we come up with will be arrived at after thorough and robust discussion with the relevant stakeholders and without much delay. But we assure you, that in settling this issue, no person in Barbados will be left to fend on their own when they need medical services. Lack of money must never prevent access for basic health services. We have already seen the disastrous decline on enrolment at this University because of policy decisions which did not take into account peoples' capacity to pay. This is not who we are. This not who we must become.

We must also come to terms with what we are to do about our premier health and training institution, the QEH. For too long it has been a political football and recent efforts at reform have been largely cosmetic and ineffectual. After being regarded for decades as one of the region's premier hospitals, we can and must do better!

I give you the commitment that under a Barbados Labour Party administration we will appoint an apolitical board comprising of people with the competence and technical expertise to effectively manage and provide inspirational leadership to such a complex institution. This is the approach I took as Minister of Economic Development in appointing the boards of Invest Barbados and

BIDC in 2006. I feel very strongly about this. Getting the leadership right of the Board of a complex institution is absolutely critical.

We must also address frontally the drivers of cost. In other words, we must know what each service at the QEH costs if we are to appropriately finance the institution to deliver the core services required. We must be disciplined that where new specialized services are needed, we must acquire them through partnerships with you recognizing each new service must be justified both in terms of clinical need and cost/benefit analysis. We must be guided also by where research tells us we are most likely to get greatest impact for our investments. We also know we can make no progress unless we address the organizational culture and ensure that it takes into account empowerment of workers and departments while holding them accountable for what they must deliver. QEH leadership must have the skills to bring about increased productivity, clinical excellence and exceptional customer service at the QEH. These are the heart of what really matters if we are to give Barbadians the best health care.

The QEH must become a truly 24-hour hospital – one in which every ancillary department in the hospital is effectively manned. – and one that allows those Barbadians who want to conduct aspects of their business (like payment of bills and filling out of forms) on line, to do so. Last week Friday, I could not pay for my aunt to be admitted to the QEH because it was 4.15 – not 4pm. So instead they took a guarantee from me instead of a cheque!

We need to urgently provide the resources to open at least 2 polyclinics for 24 hours. They must be able to take some of the burden off of an over-worked

and too small Accident and Emergency Department at the QEH. Minor surgery, basic X-rays, and an Asthma Bay are needed to relieve the pressure on the A&E at the QEH. The polyclinics can continue to handle the brunt of managing the NCDs efficiently in the day but their capacity must also be expanded by the leveraging of Telemedicine.

We have a duty in a challenging economic environment to ensure that existing investments in health sector made in this country are fully utilized. We have a duty to leverage technology where possible to broaden access to services. This is not breaking new ground but broadening and perfecting what is currently happening and doing it with a sense of urgency.

The truth also is, when we speak of health care as in other aspects of development in Barbados, we have to confront the future as it is and not as we would want it to be. Given the 17 downgrades in our credit rating since 2010, Barbados cannot easily nor cheaply borrow money on the international market to build buildings for the sake of erecting a showpiece. We can no longer afford those indulgences.

The point must be made here that Barbados does not today, as the fourth most indebted country in the world, have the luxury of building a new hospital for almost a billion dollars to deliver services, some of which can be sourced from among some of you. A time will come for a new Hospital when we have returned this country to a sustainable growth path.

When we add to our debt today, it must be to fulfill vital public needs like additional operating theatres, expanding our Accident & Emergency

Department, ensuring that our surgical and medical Intensive Care Units are adequate and provide world class standards of treatment. This is what is urgent. I have never been able to accept our country can be happy when persons in pain wait for more than a day for treatment in A and E or others must wait for months or years for simple operations that, while not life threatening, affect their quality of life. If we do not want it for ourselves, then it is not good enough for anyone!

HEALTH AND WELLNESS AS ECONOMIC SECTOR

A key part of Barbados' national development strategy going forward must therefore rest on how we treat the health and wellness sector both socially and economically. The fact that nine dollars out of every 100 spent in Barbados is related to health in some form or fashion demonstrates just how critical a sector it is.

This is why we identify in our "Covenant of Hope" a clear vision that as part of our new economy we will develop and promote Barbados as a key Educational and Health Hub for the hemisphere.

It is a fact that the sectors of education and health are among those in which Barbados has the greatest competitiveness as measured by the Global Competitiveness Index. Regrettably, we have seen slippage in the last 5 years. Rescuing and transforming Barbados requires that we reverse this trend and that we redouble our efforts to transform these sectors.

Our vision for health as an economic sector rests on three platforms - opportunities for Economic enfranchisement; the development of medical tourism; and the export of medical services.

We will have to look for the excess capacity within the system to help us deliver universal quality healthcare to Barbadians. Strategic partnerships can be expanded or developed that can deliver quality and reliable services at affordable prices as is done presently through the Heart & Stroke Foundation and the Diabetes Foundation. We will enhance these efforts.

There has also been a great deal of investment in this sector. Some is under utilized. We will build on accessing these services without the government having to replicate these investments. In addition, any opportunities for new investment must be treated as a cooperative effort between the public sector and sectors such as yours. This will allow your Government to concentrate on being a regulator and facilitator and financing its core responsibilities.

Indeed, existing ancillary services within the health sector must be treated as investment opportunities. Such areas may be as simple as the provision of television on Private Wards or within the rapidly developing area of Telemedicine and Health Records management. The expansion of Telemedicine and the deployment of digital Health Records, or even more innovatively the use of individual Health Smart Cards will inevitably bring great efficiencies to the delivery of medical care as well as to help control costs. There is too much use of technology informally in our midst. We can no longer deny its potential to help us do our job better but we must always plan for the attendant risks.

The effective deployment of this technology will inevitably excite the participation of the private sector. There are large numbers of young Barbadians who have left school in the last decade with a keen interest in information technology. These areas provide significant entrepreneurial opportunities for this growing number of persons. We need to facilitate access to these opportunities, even if there is a need to partner with larger local and international entities.

Telemedicine is only the beginning. When we speak about expanding investment opportunities I believe that the size of Barbados and the kind of expertise we have in this very room should allow Barbados to be at the cutting edge of some niche sector, whether in research, service delivery, medical information technology. We should be able to identify one niche area that we can put the full weight of Government facilitation and joint investment as a Gold Star Project on which to develop global and hemispheric prominence. Opportunities exist for you to pursue partnerships with pharmaceutical companies to explore the rich potential of our plant life. I invite you to talk with me, give me your recommendations as we will need to harness our collective passion to become pioneers and global exemplars.

Sadly, I must say the difficulties faced by businesses across the board with excessive and ineffective regulation and bureaucracy are also hampering key investments in the health and wellness sector. In some instances, the excessive delays and bureaucracy have torpedoed otherwise legitimate investments and threaten to derail existing ones. Without compromising what we must protect in the public interest, we simply must stop talking incessantly about business

facilitation and FACILITATE! The stakes are too high at this most perilous of times!

With respect to medical tourism, our brothers and sisters in the Eastern Caribbean have been coming here for decades. 1,200 CARICOM citizens on average who came here annually for treatment over the last six years. I am told this is much less than what occurred in the earlier years. We need to focus on increasing these numbers again. A CIDA Study as far back as 2007 told us that if we invested in the medical tourism sector, it had the potential over five years, to provide US\$45 million in exports encompassing medical treatment, spas, alternative medicine, diagnostic and research services, nursing and elderly care.

Similarly, we believe that many of you should be given the opportunity to partner with others within the hemisphere to provide specific types of medical services and clinics that may be more competitively delivered in Barbados than in the developed countries. In this respect we salute the Barbados Fertility Centre and the international quality work they have been doing.

Our approach will rest upon an aggressive identification of opportunities through discussions with insurance companies in the hemisphere who are looking to reduce the costs of delivery of medical services without compromising the quality of health care. This was already a platform in which we started investigations in 2007 in Invest Barbados with the help of CIDA before leaving office. It remains there in its Library!

The Barbados Labour Party recognizes that as a country we have been very slow in looking at the modernization of our medical related legislation. We will

facilitate comprehensive law reform of this legislation to facilitate the ethical and technological development within the medical fields. This will come of course only after clear national or sectoral discussions, as appropriate.

Concomitant with the development of medical tourism will be a resuscitation of our participation in the multi billion-dollar global industry of medical transcription. We must simply seek to educate and train our students to participate at a higher degree of proficiency in the Informatics Sector if we are to command higher pay for our citizens. The opportunities are there and our investment in education is too great for us not to perfect the linkages that will allow us to command higher value added for the sale of our services.

And then there is the export of medical services. In this area the greatest potential lies in the export of specialized nursing care services. Nurses are global citizens given their acute shortage in the developed world. This will necessitate restructuring the institutional arrangements (in partnership with others from outside the region) for the delivery of training and expanding significantly the number of nurses trained and the areas for specialisation. We can in this area go beyond satisfying our local needs.

We will also put institutional arrangements in place to strengthen and support the development of the nursing profession, not as an afterthought, but as a strategic complement to high quality medical practice.

Equally, the promotion of opportunities for our doctors will not escape our attention. The scope will inevitably be more limited than in the export of nursing services given the accreditation and cross border issues. While doctors

are not permitted to advertise we can promote in innovative ways e.g. the brand Barbados Wellness or whatever name we come with to assist many of you in being more competitive as BTMI and Invest Barbados currently does for the tourism and international financial services sector.

I should state that given the clear constraint that will present itself with the over supply of doctors since the establishment of our medical faculty at Cave Hill, there will need to be urgent intervention to expand the available opportunities for our graduates in areas of research and practice in the wider region. This may necessitate a concerted diplomatic effort to allow those students who may not have received the requisite clinical experience to be able to do so. We will have to work harder to find a strategic partnership with other medical schools to ensure that the investment is not lost and that young people's dreams are not frustrated by lack of opportunity.

There will also have to be once and for all an urgent resolution of the unacceptable situation where Barbadian doctors training in Cuba have been unable to return home to practice. It is unfair and it is not the fault of the students. Our role as a Government is to facilitate and resolve issues - not to stand by idly as injustice and unfairness unfolds!

PUBLIC HEALTH

So we understand clearly as a party the imperative to treat to health as a key development platform for Barbados. However, no such discussion could be complete without addressing the Public Health of the Nation.

Barbados as a small island of 166 square miles learnt the critical importance of maintaining a strong public health environment. This was as far back as almost a century ago. That is why Barbados gave the region distinguished public health pioneers like Sir Kenneth Standard, Sir Kenneth Stuart and Sir Maurice Byer and Dame Nita Barrow.

We are flirting with disaster in Barbados with our public health.

The risk factors are simply unacceptably high. From the water crisis to non-collection of garbage for weeks to increased illegal dumping in gullies to overgrown bush in communities. I have spoken earlier of some of the grave consequences we have experienced.

The National Insurance Scheme alerted us to the extraordinary number of sick claims resulting from the Chikungunya epidemic. It was only last month that your own organization, BAMP, alerted us to the risk of cholera and other water-borne diseases in the face of large numbers of Barbadians going for weeks without water! And yet we have not bought the vital equipment to fix the South Coast Sewerage Project for the last year nor has the Government signed off on the Reverse Osmosis Plant at the Belle, which is needed to improve our water quality and for which Proposals were requested as far back as 2007. How does a Government build a multi-storey headquarters for the SSA at Vacluse for \$28 million when it has needed to buy for the last 3 years 35 Garbage trucks at half of the price to provide island wide garbage collection to which Barbadians have become accustomed?

In addition, the notion of preventing persons living here for years from accessing health care at the Polyclinics is not only wrong but has the potential to undermine our public health gains.

I give you now the assurance as I did at our last Annual Conference, our Party's highest decision making body – and as we have done in the Covenant of Hope. We believe that in the conduct of fiscal governance we must be clear as to what commands priority in our public expenditure especially given our fiscal reality. We have said definitively – Barbadians must have access to water; Barbados must be a safe place to live; we will always protect our public health and the rights of our people to universal access to health care. There are other priorities not relevant tonight like education. These are the choices we will make in how we spend the taxpayers' dollars. But beyond that we will use all of the powers of a Government to achieve our objective of ALWAYS protecting our public health.

So my friends, I have said much and some of you might be saying "She really serious? How are we going to climb this mountain? Things too dread for us to do all of this". I will not simply say to you, in the language of a former Prime Minister, Tom Adams when he responded in two words to a long minute from the then Central Bank Governor expressing great anxiety, "Fear Not!"

I shall give you the example of a nation that confronted one of the most severe threats to its national development and the well-being of its people, particularly its youth – the future of the nation.

I refer specifically to the HIV-AIDS Pandemic. Our Party through then Prime Minister, Owen Arthur, exhibited the political will by moving responsibility for it to his office and appointing strong technical leadership in the form of Dr. Carol Jacobs, and giving it the requisite financial and public resources. It was not held hostage to the traditional silo approach of Government.

Years later, we have become a global leader in the management of this pandemic. We have virtually eliminated the mother to child transmissions of HIV and congenital syphilis; we have had no case of HIV transmissions from a blood transfusion; and we have reduced our incidence of HIV significantly and this continues to go in the right direction.

Tonight, I give you the assurance that I will provide similar political leadership and commitment of the public resources to allow the health and wellness sector to be one of our key platforms to achieve social justice and economic prosperity – to take us, my friends, to the next level of development. Should it be the will of the people to allow us to be their next Government, we know that we can only succeed TOGETHER. We, cannot do it alone, we need your commitment and help, to make Barbados work again for all Barbadians!

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