

CASE STUDY 10: The Cervical Cancer e-Petition – Healthy Caribbean Coalition

The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) is using the eHealth platform to build public awareness and create social advocacy movements from the grass-roots which drive improved cervical cancer policies and programs and simultaneously increase demand and uptake of these services. Using social media young Caribbean people are being asked to stand up and take action by signing the first of its kind in the region – electronic petition which requests Heads of Government of Caribbean Countries to increase Caribbean women’s access to affordable Cervical Cancer screening. This goal of the petition supports the internationally and regionally agreed goal of 80% coverage in cervical cancer screening by 2025 and the WHO Best Buy Interventions in particular for cancer: Screening and treatment of pre-cancerous lesions to prevent cervical cancer.



The HCC, formed in 2008, is a network of non-governmental and civil society organizations from across the Caribbean Region with a remit to address NCDs. Building upon the highly successful 2011 *Get The Message mHealth* campaign in which over 700,000 Caribbean people pledged their support for the UNHLM on NCDs, the HCC is now asking Caribbean women and men to demand universal access to cervical cancer screening. In an historical meeting in March 2013; 20 Caribbean Cancer NGOs representing 16 Caribbean countries came together in an act of solidarity to make a bold statement against cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second leading cause of death among Caribbean women with death rates several magnitudes higher than countries such as the USA. More than 95% of cases of cervical cancer can be prevented, so why are 31,700 women in Latin America and the Caribbean dying each year? Comparatively low access and uptake of cervical cancer screening is one of the primary factors contributing to the high burden of disease in the Caribbean.

This initiative seeks to meet young people where they are in the electronic space through social media and arm them with basic information about cervical cancer and the importance of getting the Pap Test thereby establishing positive attitudes and health seeking habits from a young age. The petition is being promoted among young people through social media, traditional media and mobile platforms. Young champions will also be identified as advocates for the cause; using their voices and influence to increase youth awareness and urge young people to sign the petition. Exploiting the eHealth space to create young agents of social change has been heralded as groundbreaking for the Caribbean. It is hoped that the very agency which drives a young woman to sign this petition will also increase her likelihood of seeking a Pap Test. The process empowers young people with the knowledge and the power to be equal partners in shaping health programming and policy particularly within the context of NCDs. The HCC hopes that this project will serve as a platform for increasing regional advocacy efforts of young Caribbean people.