



VOTE OF THANKS

Presented by

Dr. Hyacinth Blake, Director Division of Ageing

Date: 30 July, 2021

Good day everyone. Early Emancipation Day Greetings to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and a big thank you to those of you who are online with us locally and overseas on this the last day of the Webinar Series on Elder Abuse in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is indeed my privilege and pleasure to say thank you to all who have contributed to the success of this series. As we end this four-part webinar series, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many persons who have contributed in various ways to ensure that this, the first of many webinars for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, Division of Ageing (DOA), was a huge success. It augurs well to see so many persons coming forward to be involved in our innovative efforts to support older persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

As you can derive from the many presentations over the four (4) day period, local, regional and international experts delivered on various topics on elder abuse. We achieved the objectives of the Webinar Series, which included:

- To sensitize and bring awareness to the prevalence of Elder Abuse in Trinidad and Tobago.
- To encourage persons to report cases of elder abuse.
- To sensitize family members and caregivers of their role in curbing elder abuse.
- To obtain feedback and recommendations from the public relevant to elder abuse.

- To inform the public about the services provided by MSDFS that can support older persons and their caregivers including the Older Persons Information Centre (OPIC) managed by the DOA, the National Family Services Division (NFSD) counselling hotline, and other support available via the Social Welfare Division.
- To encourage research on older persons and elder abuse by University students and academics.
- To obtain recommendations from the national community to inform policy development to address elder abuse prevention and interventions to provide care and support to persons who are susceptible to or have been the victim of elder abuse.
- To promote a safe living environment and better quality of life for older persons.

I would like to first thank Senator the Honourable Donna Cox, Minister of Social Development and Family Services, who continues to be a National Champion for older people and the underserved in Trinidad and Tobago. Minister, we thank you.

Thank you to our esteemed former Permanent Secretary, Mrs Jacinta Bailey-Sobers, for the warm welcome on the opening of the webinar series. We wish Mrs Bailey-Sobers the very best in her new portfolio at the Office of Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, and good success in her future endeavours.

To our distinguished panel of Presenters:

- Ms. Jackie Marshall-Cyrus, Keynote Speaker, United Kingdom
- Ms. Aretha Clarke, Programme Coordinator, Aging Unit, Tobago House of Assembly
- Mr. Don Bethelmie, Health Economics Unit, UWI St. Augustine, Trinidad
- Dr. Debra Joseph, UWI, Cavehill, Barbados
- Mrs. Aisha Corbie, Manager, Victim and Witness Support Unit, TTPS
- Dr. Innette Cambridge, Retired University Lecturer, UWI, St. Augustine

- Ms. Kathleen Sarkar, Assistant Director, National Family Services Division
- Dr. Jennifer Rouse, Gerontologist, UWI
- Mrs. Reena Dass-Ramkissoo, Inspector II, Division of Aging
- Ms. Crystal Felix, Inspector II, Division of Aging
- Ms. Ruqayyah Scott, Undergraduate Student and Intern, Health Economics Unit, UWI, St. Augustine
- Ms. Shari-Ann Jackson, Postgraduate Diploma Gerontology Candidate, UWI, Mona Jamaica

We thank you for sharing your knowledge with us, and for being part of this initiative. The Division of Aging looks forward to your continued support.

To our specially invited and esteemed Guest contributors:

- Dr. Liam Foster, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy and Social Work at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom; and,
- Mrs. Betty Ann Pilgrim, National Administrator Nursing Services, Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago,

We are tremendously appreciative of your contribution and support.

The planning of this event is due to the hard work of staff members of the Division of Ageing and several other Departments in the, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services who worked tirelessly throughout the past few months to host this interactive webinar series. They include:

DOA Team members

- Mrs. Quelyn Joseph
- Ms. Sophia Kennedy
- Mrs. Hannah Ramroop Millet
- Ms. Nyiida Andrews, and
- Ms. Janinka Gomes

Corporate Communications and Education Unit Team

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Adult Education Programme

- Ms. Amanda Lewis, and
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National Family Services Division

- Ms. Darcel Lewis, and
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NGO Unit

- Ms. Lisa Ramlogan

Disability Affairs Unit

- Ms. Asenath Mc Ewen, and
- Ms. Tessa Pascall

We also graciously thank our hard working, sign language interpreters:

- Ms. Naiobi Rodriguez, and
- Ms. Raeanne Hutton.

To our dynamic chairperson, Ms. Josanne Leonard and our hard working Producer, Ms. Francola John thank you for your commitment to this initiative, and for your sterling effort to ensure the success of this series.

And as we say, we save the best for last, **you**, the online participants. We thank you for logging on and engaging us via our virtual social media platforms. We look forward to your continued partnership as we work to ensure the wellbeing of our elders in Trinidad and Tobago.

THE WAY FORWARD:

The Division of Ageing is heartened by the rich and insightful recommendations presented by the panellists and online audience throughout this series. The recommendations received will inform the review of the 2007 National Policy on Aging and the creation of a National Action Plan on Aging which is currently underway in the Ministry, as well as the legislative review of the Homes for Older Persons Act (2007) and Regulations (2009). More extensive consultations will be held in the ensuing months on these critical policy documents.

The Division notes the recommendation from Ms. Aretha Clarke (Programme Coordinator of the Aging Unit in the THA) for a policy on elder abuse to be formulated

and looks forward to partnering with the Aging Unit on such an important initiative. And I want to assure Dr. Rouse that based on the internal review of the National Policy on Ageing (2007) and the sensitisation exercise held in April 2021, the creation of omnibus legislation on older persons, as well as the establishment of an Authority under the new thematic area in the NPA (i.e. "Capacity Building") have been included in the draft document.

Existing and new programmes and projects that will serve to mitigate against elder abuse and ameliorate its impact on survivors will be operationalised given the information obtained at the webinar series and the upcoming consultative exercises.

The Division will continue to partner with the National Family Services Division, and the Social Welfare Division within the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, as well as other state agencies such as the Ministry of Health and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, to increase awareness about elder abuse, identify and provide support to survivors, and bring perpetrators to justice.

We encourage persons to call the Division's toll free hotline at 800-OPIC (6742) if you suspect that you, or someone you know is a victim of elder abuse. Alternatively, you can email us at opic@social.gov.tt

The Division will also engage non-governmental organisations, faith based organisations, grassroots organisations and academic institutions on strategies to address elder abuse. This complex issue requires an all of society approach. I am optimistic that we will be able to curb the scourge of elder abuse, once we work together as one people, to empower and support our elders in their golden years.

We encourage you to continue to visit the social media pages of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for information that will assist you with identifying and preventing elder abuse. Videos of the webinar series are currently available on the Ministry's Facebook page, and the PowerPoint presentations can be obtained from our website at www.social.gov.tt

Knowledge is indeed power so please take full advantage of these resources. And, let us continue to ensure that our elders are cherished, honoured, empowered, and free to enjoy all the rights that are innately theirs as human beings.

Thank you and God bless.