
Statement By Honourable Vincent Wheatley Minister For Health And Social Development

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On this World Cancer Day, we must come together as a community with one voice, standing united in the fight against cancer. This disease has affected far too many of our families, friends, and loved ones within our communities, touching our lives in one way or another. But today, we have an opportunity to unite our efforts in the fight against cancer, recognising that early detection, timely intervention, and prevention save lives. Through education, awareness, and preventive care, we can reduce its impact.

This year marks the beginning of the “United by Unique” three-year campaign, a bold, transformative and people-centred approach to cancer care. It represents a vital shift in how health systems serve us, focusing not just on treating diseases but on listening to the unique perspectives and experiences of individuals, families, and communities. At its core, this campaign places individuals, families, and communities at the heart of our health systems. Here in the Virgin Islands, this resonates deeply with our values of compassion, resilience, and community support.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development is pleased to work with the BVI Cancer Society, whose tireless work in supporting, educating, and advocating for

patients is exemplary. I urge all residents to support their efforts, as they play a vital role in improving cancer care in our Territory.

While medical advancements continue to improve treatment, prevention remains our most powerful tool and small lifestyle changes can make a big difference.

Research shows that up to 40% of cancers can be prevented through healthy lifestyle choices and regular screenings. I encourage everyone to maintain a balanced diet rich in whole fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins while avoiding processed foods, excess sugar, and unhealthy fats. Avoiding tobacco, including second-hand smoke, significantly reduces cancer risk. Limiting alcohol consumption, engaging in at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity, and maintaining a healthy weight also contributes to reducing risk. Protecting the skin with sunscreen, wearing protective clothing, and minimising sun exposure can help lower skin cancer incidence.

Here in the Virgin Islands, breast, colon, and prostate cancers are among the most prevalent. That means we must be proactive and prioritise screening and early detection. Additionally, we are working with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to eliminate cervical cancer as part of regional initiatives in the Americas.

Through increased HPV vaccination, expanded screenings, and timely treatment, we aim to eradicate cervical cancer.

Regular screenings are essential for early detection. Women aged 21-65 should have routine Pap smears and HPV testing to prevent cervical cancer. Breast cancer screening should begin with annual mammograms at age 40 or earlier for those at higher risk. Men aged 50 and older, or 40+ with a family history, should discuss PSA blood tests and digital rectal exams for prostate cancer. For both men and women, colorectal cancer screening should start at age 45 with regular colonoscopies to detect and remove precancerous polyps. Heavy smokers aged 50-80 should consider low-dose CT scans for early lung cancer detection. Regular self-exams and professional skin checks help identify skin cancer, especially for those with a history of sun exposure.

Cancer affects us all, but by making informed choices, prioritising screenings, and supporting organisations like the BVI Cancer Society, we can save lives and build a healthier Virgin Islands. Let's not wait until cancer affects someone that we love to

take action. I encourage everyone to take charge of their health, schedule screenings, make healthier choices, and spread awareness. Together, we can reduce the burden of cancer in our Territory and create a future where fewer families have to face this challenge and create a healthier Virgin Islands.