

STATEMENT

Tel: (284)468-2730

Official Government Website:

<https://gov.vg>

Statement By The Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley Minister For Health And Social Development on the Launch Of The Virgin Islands Eat Well Guide

Release Date: 4 June, 2025

Statement By The Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley

Minister For Health And Social Development

**AT THE FIFTH SITTING OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTH HOUSE OF
ASSEMBLY**

OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

TUESDAY, 3RD JUNE, 2025

Launch Of The Virgin Islands Eat Well Guide

Madam Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on a critical initiative in our national health agenda, namely, the official launch of The Virgin Islands Eat Well Guide and Dietary Guidelines.

Madam Speaker, it is no secret that chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and heart disease, continue to plague our communities. Despite our persistent efforts, we are still losing too many of our family members, friends, and colleagues to conditions that are, for the most part, preventable through healthier lifestyle choices.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains resolute in its commitment to empowering our people through information, education, and supportive policies.

We strive to remain at the cutting edge, ensuring that The Virgin Islands has the tools it needs to thrive with positive behaviour change and safeguard our greatest asset — our people.

Today, Madam Speaker, I am proud to present to this Honourable House our latest tool in this important mission: The Virgin Islands Eat Well Guide and Dietary Guidelines. This initiative represents a transformational step forward in the Ministry's ongoing efforts to promote better health outcomes for all our residents.

The Eat Well Guide provides a comprehensive, evidence-based framework to combat chronic diseases by encouraging balanced nutrition and active living at every stage of life.

Madam Speaker, this is more than just a guide, it is a roadmap to a healthier future. It equips our citizens with the tools and knowledge to make informed and nutritious choices every day. It reminds us that eating well is not about restriction, but about empowerment and choosing foods that nourish both body and mind.

Beyond individual health, this Guide supports our national priorities of food security and sustainability. It promotes the consumption of locally grown produce and traditional foods, which are often more nutritious and help to support local producers, therefore, benefiting both our economy and our well-being.

Madam Speaker, the Eat Well Guide is also a strategic resource for our public health professionals, educators, and policymakers. It supports the development of unified and targeted nutrition education and programmes that enhance our collective response to the NCD epidemic.

The Guide is built around five main food groups:

1. Fruits and Vegetables – Rich in essential nutrients, these are vital for disease prevention and immune function.
2. Starchy Carbohydrates & Grains – A key source of energy and fiber, especially whole grains.
3. Animal Protein and Alternatives – Important for muscle maintenance, including plant-based sources like legumes.
4. Dairy and Alternatives – Crucial for bone health, providing calcium and protein.
5. Fats and Oils – Necessary in moderation for brain function and hormone regulation, with an emphasis on healthy plant-based fats.

As part of our implementation strategy, we expect that the Eat Well Guide will become the standard tool for nutrition education in schools, healthcare settings, community outreach, and professional training programmes across the Territory. We also encourage the public to embrace it and incorporate it into their daily lives.

The team at the Ministry of Health and Social Development will collaborate with stakeholders to develop educational materials, health promotion initiatives, and social marketing campaigns that support the use of the Guide. Looking ahead, we also aim to partner with food vendors to ensure that foods prepared for sale align with the standards outlined in the Guide.

To further support the adoption of these principles, the Ministry will also explore and bring forward to Cabinet for consideration, the introduction of a protected essential food basket. This initiative aims to ensure that nutritious food items remain accessible and affordable, particularly for the most vulnerable, and to help create a supportive environment for long-term behaviour change.

Madam Speaker, this Guide is not just a document, it is a call to action. A call to eat well, live well, and build a healthier Virgin Islands one meal, one family, one community at a time.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.