GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

Tel: (284)468-2730
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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE VINCENT O. WHEATLEY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN OBSERVANCE OF DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH 2026

Release Date: 5 November, 2026



Fellow Virgin Islanders and residents,

Every November, we turn our attention to diabetes, a condition that continues to affect too many individuals and families across The Virgin Islands.

Year after year, we raise awareness of diabetes and other non-communicable diseases. We share information, encourage healthier lifestyles and promote the importance of prevention. Yet, despite these efforts, the burden of these diseases continues to grow.

It is estimated that **over 4,000 people in The Virgin Islands are living with diabetes**, many of whom are still undiagnosed. Across the Americas, more than **112 million adults** are living with the condition, with **up to 40 percent unaware** of their diagnosis. These figures are deeply concerning, but they also strengthen our determination to act.

This tells us something important: **awareness alone is not enough. We must begin putting what we know into practice.**

This year's theme, **“Early Action on Diabetes,”** underscores the importance of early intervention and how taking action now can change the course of our health and make a significant difference to our well-being in the years ahead.

When it comes to type 2 diabetes, prevention is the earliest action we can take.

We can begin by making healthier choices in our everyday lives, particularly in how we eat and how physically active we are.

As Caribbean people, we enjoy some of the most delicious dishes, filled with flavour. While we do not have to abandon the foods we know and love, we must be mindful of how much we consume and how often we indulge.

Many of our favourite foods, including rice, bread and ground provisions, contain carbohydrates that the body breaks down into glucose, or sugar. While carbohydrates are an important source of energy, consuming more than our bodies need can contribute to poor blood sugar management.

Moderation and balance are therefore essential. The Ministry’s **Virgin Islands Eat Well Guide** provides practical guidance on portion sizes, balanced meals and healthier food choices, using many of the local foods we already enjoy.

Regular physical activity is equally important. Whether it is walking, swimming, dancing or participating in another activity you enjoy, finding ways to move more can help reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Through our **BVI Moves** programme, the Ministry continues to encourage greater physical activity and healthier lifestyles across the Territory. By engaging communities, schools and workplaces, the programme creates opportunities for individuals and families to become more active and make movement a regular part of their daily lives.

However, prevention is only one part of early action.

Early detection is just as important.

Diabetes can develop gradually, sometimes without any noticeable symptoms. This is why I continue to encourage everyone, particularly those with known risk factors, to attend regular health check-ups and speak with their healthcare provider about blood sugar testing.

Knowing your blood sugar levels, blood pressure and cholesterol can help you better understand your health and take action before serious complications develop.

It is also important to recognise the warning signs of diabetes. Frequent urination, excessive thirst, unexplained weight loss, unusual tiredness and blurred vision are among the symptoms that should not be ignored. If you experience these symptoms, seek medical advice promptly.

The BVI Health Services Authority, through its **Red Loud Campaign**, continues to promote early screening, healthier lifestyles and greater public awareness of diabetes, hypertension and kidney disease. These efforts complement the Ministry's ongoing commitment to reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases throughout the Territory. Alongside these prevention and awareness initiatives, the Ministry continues to prioritise the consistent availability of essential medicines, including insulin, across our healthcare facilities.

We are also working closely with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to adopt the HEARTS-D technical package for diabetes management. This initiative will introduce standardised, evidence-based approaches to diabetes care across both public and private healthcare facilities, helping to ensure that persons living with diabetes receive consistent, quality care regardless of where they seek treatment. We anticipate launching this initiative in 2027, marking another important step towards strengthening diabetes management throughout the Territory.

For those already living with diabetes, early action means remaining consistent with treatment, attending scheduled appointments, monitoring blood sugar as advised and seeking support when needed. With appropriate care and effective management, persons living with diabetes can continue to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

As we observe Diabetes Awareness Month, I encourage each of us to make a commitment to our health. Schedule that overdue check-up. Take a closer look at your eating habits. Find opportunities to be more active. Encourage a family member or friend to take their health seriously.

I also wish to recognise and commend the **BVI Diabetes Association** for its longstanding commitment to diabetes education, advocacy and support for persons living with diabetes and their families. Through its outreach programmes, health screenings and community activities, the Association continues to play an invaluable role in raising awareness, encouraging early detection and promoting healthier lifestyles throughout The Virgin Islands.

Throughout November, there will be several opportunities for residents to become involved, and I encourage everyone to participate. These include **BVI Wellness Fest on 7th November, the Elton Georges Annual Run/Walk on 14th November, the Health Symposium on 20th and 21st November, and the Paint the Town Blue initiative on 27th November.** Each of these activities provides an opportunity to learn, become more active, support one another and demonstrate our collective commitment to a healthier Territory.

Let this be the year that awareness leads to meaningful action.

Remember, early action can prevent or delay type 2 diabetes, early detection can reduce the risk of complications, and timely treatment can save lives.

Together, let us take charge of our health and work towards a healthier Virgin Islands.

For Additional Information Contact:

Natasha Lettsome-Humphrey
Public Health Communications Specialist
Ministry of Health and Social Development

Telephone: 468-2286

Email: nlettsome@gov.vg