



MOVEMBER

Men's Health Awareness Month

The Cancer Society is observing November as Men's Health Awareness Month, a time when we focus on helping men improve the quality of their lives by providing the tools and information they need to manage their physical and mental health problems. As noted by many health professionals in The Bahamas, Bahamian men tend to be unwilling to seek professional help for their health issues, often choosing to ignore them until they become too difficult to treat. Some men cope by using drugs or alcohol, which, among other things, eventually leads to further health problems. However, with more understanding and support, the Cancer Society hopes that Bahamian men will become motivated to seek help and take control of their health.

Health Issues Affecting Bahamian Men

During our Monthly General Meeting on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, speaker Dr. Nicholas Fox stated that in The Bahamas, the most prevalent cancer affecting men is Prostate Cancer, a malignant tumor that is harmful yet curable, particularly when caught and treated early. According to Dr. Fox, many Prostate Cancers are slow-growing and stay within the prostate gland, causing little harm. However, some grow rapidly and spread to nearby organs, where they irreparably damage cells.

In 2021, the World Health Organization released a report stating that there were 200 new cases of Prostate Cancer in The Bahamas in 2020, and according to Dr. Fox, one in six Bahamian men will develop it in their lifetime.

While Prostate Cancer is of high concern in The Bahamas, many other conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, affect Bahamian men at alarmingly high rates. Despite the lower quality of life and health risks caused by these conditions, Bahamian men remain generally reluctant to receive medical help, only doing so when pressed by spouses or other relatives.

According to Dr. Fox, heart disease, one of the leading causes of death of Bahamian men, is a silent killer, having few to no symptoms in its early stages. He also states that diabetes, which disproportionately affects Bahamian men, increases the risk of erectile dysfunction, often an early warning sign of heart disease.

As outlined by the National Health Insurance Authority, here are some of the facts relating to men and their health:

- On average, the life expectancy of men is five years lower than that of women.
- Compared to women, men have a higher death rate from suicide and non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease.
- Men are half as likely to visit a physician for prevention than women.

Bahamian Men and Mental Health

According to the World Health Organization, some of the most common causes of mental health issues in men are from stresses, which may stem from:

- Traumatic life events
- Relationship issues
- Employment difficulties
- Physical health complications
- Social isolation
- Significant life changes
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Genetics

In a 2019 report, the United Nations stated that men in The Bahamas have a suicide rate that is five times higher than that of their female counterparts, mainly because they are less likely to seek mental health services due to cultural expectations of masculinity that emphasize toughness, dominance, and risk-taking. Instead, they may turn to drugs, alcohol or violence, which may serve as a temporary escape from mental anguish but can lead to addiction and, in turn, life-threatening health issues and financial loss.

Aside from substance abuse, suicide, and financial stress, mental health issues can also cause men to experience problems with relationships, family conflicts, social isolation, cognitive and education difficulties, extreme mood swings, and a general feeling of hopelessness. In a study by the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*, researchers found that participants who felt depressed had higher rates of heart attacks and strokes than those who didn't, indicating a strong correlation between heart disease and poor mental health.

How Bahamian Men Can Improve Their Physical and Mental Health

While improving your health is a long, ongoing journey, by taking achievable steps, Bahamian men can enhance their quality of life and create a better future for themselves and their loved ones.

For men seeking to prioritize their well-being, medical professionals recommend the following tips:

- Scheduling regular visits with a physician to check your blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol levels.
- Getting regular screening tests, as they can help prevent diseases, like cancer, or detect them early.
- Taking care of your physical appearance, such as hair, skin, nails, which can increase your self-esteem.
- Obtaining a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week to reduce stress and boost your overall health.
- Consuming a healthy diet of fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins, which assists in maintaining a healthy weight and lowering the chance of developing chronic diseases.
- Learning about and recognizing the signs of mental health problems, which may include mood swings (anger, irritability, and controlling behavior), changes in sleep schedule and quality of sleep, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, changes in appetite, and fluctuating energy levels.
- Seeking help from a mental health professional
- Building a support network of friends, family, and mental health support group members who can encourage healthy habits and keep you accountable on your health journey.

What is the Cancer Society's role to assist?

US Too Men's Cancer Support Group, an affiliate of the Cancer Society, assists men with not just scheduling their routine Prostate screenings but also building a great support system to help them through the journey of screening, follow-up visits, treatment, and life after surgery. Men must break the stigma of fighting this battle alone and allow others to help them through difficult times.

To further help men protect their health, the Cancer Society continually disseminates information on various cancers and health screenings via social media platforms. The Society also encourages men to enroll with National Health Insurance, a government-funded program that gives Bahamians free access to physical exams and some cancer screening tests, including PSA testing.

Here are some of the programs and services we offer at our Headquarters:

- Free accommodations for Family Islanders undergoing cancer treatment in New Providence at our Cancer Caring Centre.
- Adult Support Group – emotional and mental support.
- Freedom Kids Club – helps children with cancer live normal childhoods by holding quarterly events catered to their disease.
- Assist with distribution of Port-a-Caths and port needles for treatment.
- Offer financial assistance for treatment to persons that do not have medical insurance
- Monthly PSA Testing in the various Family Islands

To learn more about the Cancer Society and what all they do, subscribe to our weekly Newsletter at www.cancersocietybahamas.org/newsletter. Call us at (242) 323-4442 or (242) 325-2483 or email us at admin@cancersocietybahamas.org to become a volunteer, be a spokesperson and advocate for a healthier Bahamas.