

Health group calls for action over traffic deaths

WASHINGTON DC — Traffic crashes, which claimed nearly 150,000 lives in the Americas in 2010, are the leading cause of death for children ages five to 14 and the second-leading cause for people ages 15 to 44.

According to a new report by the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), pedestrians, motorcyclists and bicyclists are most vulnerable to traffic injuries and are the most common fatal crash victims in most countries in the hemisphere.

Changes in legislation are urgently needed to reduce traffic deaths, and especially among the most vulnerable, says the newly released Global Status Report on Road Safety 2013: Supporting a Decade of Action.

Only four countries (9.5 per cent of the region's population) in the Americas have comprehensive laws that address the five most important risk factors for traffic injuries: alcohol consumption, speeding, use of motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints.

Worldwide, only 28 countries have comprehensive traffic laws, covering only seven per cent of the global population.

"Political will is needed at the highest level of government to ensure appropriate road safety legislation and stringent enforcement of laws by which we all need to abide," said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan.

"If this cannot be ensured, families and communities will continue to grieve, and health systems will continue



THE scene of a fatal car accident on Coral Harbour Road earlier this week.

Photos: Kyle Smith

to bear the brunt of injury and disability due to road traffic crashes."

In 2010, there were approximately 1.24 million deaths worldwide due to traffic injuries, roughly the same number as in 2007. According to the report, 88 countries saw reductions in traffic fatalities, but the number increased in 87 others.

In the Americas, traffic fatalities average 16.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, however the rates vary across subregions. The Spanish-speaking Caribbean and the Andean region both average 22.1 traffic deaths per 100,000, while

the average in Canada and the United States is 10.9 per 100,000.

Pedestrians, motorcyclists and bicyclists are the most vulnerable road users and the primary fatal victims of road crashes in all subregions except North America, where car occupants are the main victims. Motorcyclists and occupants of two- or three-wheeled vehicles make up 44.2 per cent of all traffic fatalities in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, 22.6 per cent in Southern Cone countries, and 14.8 per cent in the English-speaking Caribbean.

According to the report,

there is no direct relationship between traffic fatalities and the number of vehicles in circulation. Canada and the United States account for 66 per cent of all vehicles in the Americas but only 28 per cent of traffic deaths. Southern Cone countries account for 20 per cent of total vehicles in the hemisphere but 36 per cent of traffic deaths.

A number of countries in the Americas have strengthened their road safety legislation, but few have done so in a way that addresses all five main risk factors. About two-thirds of the region's countries have comprehensive laws on seatbelt use,

but only half have comprehensive laws on drunk driving, and only nine (out of 32 countries) have laws on speed limits.

"The challenge in the Americas is to have public transportation policies that prevent, for example, more growth in the use of motorcycles," said Eugenia Rodrigues, PAHO/WHO regional advisor on road safety. "We also need safe spaces where people can walk and use bicycles as an alternative form of transport."

The Global Status Report on Road Safety 2013: Supporting a Decade of Action is

the second in a series analysing to what extent countries are implementing key road safety measures. The report presents information from 182 countries, accounting for almost 99 per cent of the world's population.

The Decade of Action was mandated by the UN General Assembly as an opportunity for countries to stop and reverse the trend toward increasing traffic injuries, which — without action — would lead to the loss of some 1.9 million lives on the roads each year by 2020.

Launched on May 11, 2011, by governments across the world, the Decade of Action seeks to build capacity for road safety management, improve road and vehicle safety and the behaviour of road users, and strengthen post-crash care. WHO provides countries with technical guidance on legislation, enforcement, mass media campaigns, data collection, and trauma care.

In 2011, health authorities from throughout the Americas approved a regional plan of action on road safety that seeks to prevent traffic injuries, especially through legislation that addresses the five main risk factors: drinking and driving, speeding, and failing to use motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints.

PAHO, founded in 1902, is the oldest international public health organisation in the world. It works with its member countries to improve the health and the quality of life of the people of the Americas. It also serves as the Regional Office for the Americas of WHO.



FOUNDER and Director of the Living Heart Foundation Arthur Roberts (left) treats a former NFL player at The Bahamas Heart Centre yesterday morning.

SCREENING FOR FORMER NFL PLAYERS HELD

OVER the past three days, Dr Archie Roberts, founder and Director of the Living Heart Foundation, The National Football League and the NFL Player Care Foundation have teamed up with Dr Conville Brown and the Bahamas Heart Centre to

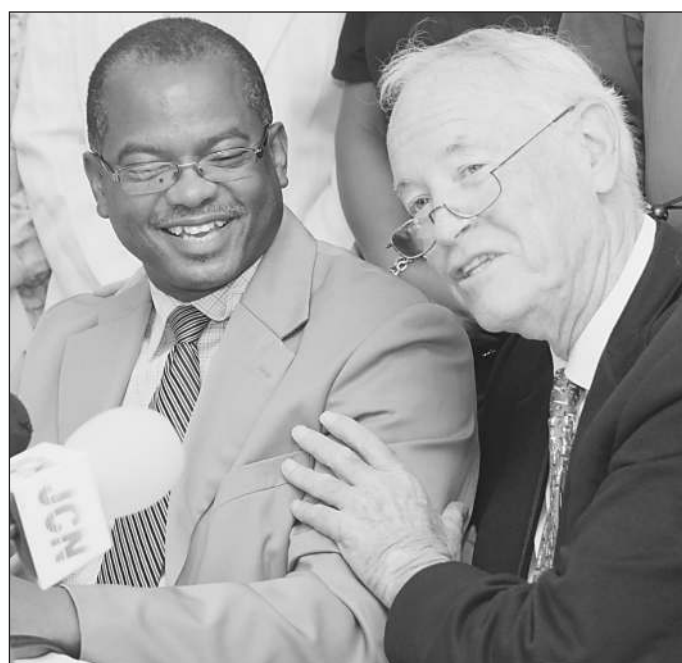
perform their first Health Screening Clinic outside of the US at Atlantis and the Heart Centre.

This screening, which is sponsored by the NFL Player Care Foundation, saw players undergoing a variety of health screenings including

cardiovascular screenings with EKGs, echocardiograms and coronary calcium scoring. Additionally, carotid scans were done to assess the risk of stroke. Men's health was further assessed with a urology component by the American Urologic Association and assisted by a consultant urologist at the Princess Margaret Hospital.

Dr Roberts, himself a former quarterback for the Cleveland Browns noted that athletes in the NFL are commonly larger than life, easily weighing between 300 to 400 pounds. These players also inflict massive damage to their bodies through rigorous training and frequent broken bones, dislocated joints, and even early arthritis. Once they retire, Dr Roberts said, their level of activity declines, leaving them prone to heart disease and many orthopedic and mental health ailments.

Dr Roberts said he therefore saw an "unmet need" for a large number of retired players who were not necessarily receiving the kind of medical attention that they deserve in their later years of life.



CEO of the Bahamas Heart Centre Conville Brown (left) and Founder and Director of the Living Heart Foundation Arthur Roberts (right) talk at a press conference at The Bahamas Heart Centre yesterday morning. Photos: Kyle Smith/Tribune Staff



PROGRAMME Director for the NFL Player Care Foundation Dana Lihan make remarks at a press conference at The Bahamas Heart Centre yesterday morning.