



CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

By

**THE HONOURABLE DR. MICHAEL DARVILLE
MINISTER OF HEALTH & WELLNESS, M.P.**

On

**FY 2024/25 BUDGET DEBATE
*'Changing the Status Quo, Changing Lives'***

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
DATE: Tuesday June 11th, 2024
TIME: 3pm**

GREETINGS

MADAM SPEAKER

I am truly grateful for another opportunity to once again address this Honorable House and to put on record at the onset of my contribution that I fully support this 2024/2025 budget. As the Member of Parliament for the great constituency of Tall Pines and the Minister of Health & Wellness I remain focused on the deliverables outlined in my Ministry's portfolio and work daily to create conditions in healthcare that will save and improve lives. With the greatest humility I consider it an honor to be tasked by our Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Philip Brave Davis with the **upgrading** and delivering on the mandate outlined in our **Blueprint for Change** which commits me as a Member of Parliament to focus on the advancement of my constituents and as Minister of Health & Wellness to focus on **shoring** up the capacity of our healthcare system.

TALL PINES

MADAM SPEAKER

With your leave, I wish to take this opportunity in the beginning of my presentation to acknowledge the wonderful residents of Tall Pines who have entrusted me with the responsibility of representing them. So as I stand in this Honorable House undergirded by their support, I am reminded of the biblical verse from Isaiah chapter 40 verse 31 which says, *“But they that wait upon The Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.”* With this guiding principle, I am convinced we will have the strength to run in the good times, walk by faith through our challenging times knowing that with God on our side we will persevere.

MADAM SPEAKER

It is an honor to represent the residents of Tall Pines, a delight to work with the community, to address their personal concerns and ultimately improve the lives of the people I am privileged to serve. In this current budget cycle we were able to accomplish many of our goals for Tall Pines and I am confident that we will

accomplish even more with resources allocated in the upcoming 2024/2025 Budget.

MADAM SPEAKER

The Tall Pines road paving projects lead by the member for Central and South Eleuthera is going well. We finished paving the main Jubilee Gardens road and Bellot road east leading to Gladstone road. We will now move to Apple Street off of Faith Avenue West then go to some of the back streets off Faith Avenue East. Our street patching program is also going very well and as I make my weekly inspections in the community, I do see additional needs that were reported for repairs.

So as we strive to improve conditions I encourage all residents of Tall Pines to report their concerns at our office in person on Faith and Bellot road opened week days from 9am to 5pm or please contact us at phone number 361-7471.

MADAM SPEAKER

I am also pleased to report that we are making great progress in keeping the community and verges clean. Our Tall Pines employment program is bearing good

fruit and in just over two and a half years we can boost that hundreds of residents have found gainful employment through my Tall Pines employment and training unit. After multiple meetings I am pleased to report that after petitioning our constituency case **for** an urban renewal center in Tall Pines, the Minister responsible for Urban Renewal, the Member for Carmichael, assured me that it was approved by a subcommittee and funding is available in this year's budget to make it happen. With this center located on Faith Avenue Tall Pines seniors can receive much needed boost from well-structured programs in the community and our youth programs will finally have the much needed support.

MADAM SPEAKER

The residents of Victoria Gardens can finally take comfort in knowing that the Government of the Bahamas is working with all scrap metal businesses operating in or in close proximity to residential areas, with a mandate for relocation. This new

policy decision will address the long term vexing issue of derelict vehicles at that subdivision entrance that the residents of Victoria Gardens faced for many years.

MADAM SPEAKER

The dump is literally in the back yard of the residents of Victoria Gardens creating some potential health risk factors. The Department of Environmental Health Services has been notified of the rodent problem that currently exist and the possible exposure to leptospirosis. I am pleased to report the Minister responsible executed a long term plan of action to address this environmental health issue and the Minister of State for the Environment, the Member for Yamacraw, addressed this issue in his contribution a few days ago.

MADAM SPEAKER

Tall Pines has many parks and green spaces used by residents for physical activity and the free Wi-Fi connectivity program will be expanded to all parks in Tall Pines this year. Finally, the long waited upgrades of Jubilee Gardens Park and pool will be completed in a few months. My team is partnering with the Ministry of Youth,

Sports & Culture who will take full responsibility for the park's upkeep, the swimming pool and swimming programs. This year we will be doing more door to door visits in the community to outline what we have been doing over the last two and a half years, listening to concerns and addressing constituents' needs. Once again thank you Tall Pines for this wonderful opportunity to serve, and I look forward to meeting with you as I move about in the community.

PM BUDGET DELIVERY COMMENDATION

MADAM SPEAKER

I now turn my attention to this year's Budget and start by congratulating the Right Honorable Prime Minister, our leader, and his dedicated team at the Ministry of Finance for their steadfast commitment and tireless efforts in steering our country towards economic recovery. The commendable results of their diligence are evident in the increasing number of economic manifestations in tourism, small business

development, the modernization of our healthcare system and the improvement in the lives and livelihood of thousands of Bahamians across the country.

MADAM SPEAKER

The macro-economic indicators are promising and after two and a half years in governance unemployment is now at its lowest since 2009, tourism arrivals continue to break records, the economy is moving in the right direction, our healthcare system is no longer on life support and healthcare is finally getting the attention it truly deserves. We are moving closer to Universal Healthcare Coverage by way of National Health Insurance and our Blueprint for Change is a living document.

MADAM SPEAKER

It is crucial to acknowledge the proactive approach to governance by our Prime Minister, in transforming our Blueprint for Change from a document of promises into a meticulously crafted roadmap of actionable items. These initiatives are not

just words on paper but represent a series of strategically executed actions, illustrating our administration's dedication to driving positive change and progress that was demonstrated from our first day in office. We are a progressive government of action and we believe in deliverables that the Bahamian people can see, feel, hear, smell and taste not recycled promises or wishful thinking.

MADAM SPEAKER

After close examination of draft revenue and expenditure estimates outlined in head 60 for the Ministry of Health & Wellness in head 66 for the Department of Public Health I wish to highlight the fact that we received a total of \$385,734,491 dollars, which represents an increase of \$37,685,007 dollars over the 2023/2024 budget.

The majority of this expenditure increase will go to the Public Hospitals Authority and the Department of Public Health for additional hires and to expand essential healthcare programs across the country.

MADAM SPEAKER

In this year's budget I am also proud to introduce for the first time 3 new line items in head 60 under the Ministry of Health & Wellness. Two of the three new line items fall under **Special Financial Transactions**. One of these line items - item **2281114** covers Longevity, stem cell and gene therapy research. In country these lifesaving therapies will be governed by a new bill that will repeal and replace the old 2016 Stem Cell. I laid the new Longevity and Regenerative Bill 2024 in this honorable place a few months ago and intend to debate and hopefully see it passed shortly. A sum of 250,000 dollars was allocated in that line item to help bring that bill into force once enacted. The second Line item **228115** National Mental Health program was allocated a half a million dollars to help bring some components of this progressive piece of legislation into force. In the current budget cycle a lot of preparatory work and post graduate train was done to prepare community clinics to bring this new mental health act into force in stages. The allocated funds in this new budget will be used for programs that would help patients and their families and establish more community programs across the country. The third new line

item **272112 - Social Assistance Benefits** was allocated 18 million dollars. The funds in this new line item was previously in head 21 of the Ministry of Finance. This year as we move closer to the implementation of Catastrophic Health Insurance, the NIB Drug Prescription Plan will move to the Ministry of Health & Wellness for further development and management.

The funds allocated will be used to pay for lifesaving drugs under the plan. In this budget cycle we will be moving and amendment to the current National Insurance (Chronic Diseases Prescription Drug Fund) Bill, which seeks to transfer management and operations of the Prescription Drug Plan and Prescription Drug Fund from NIB to the Ministry of Health & Wellness and preserves the terms and conditions of the plan. This move will make way in the future for all NHIA members who suffer from NCDs to access these lifesaving drugs. This move will also help to prevent duplication in and wastage across the public health system and **after** many years bring consistency to the drug procurement process, reduce costs and yes open the plan to more Bahamians. My Ministry has met many times with NIB about this

process and we want to assure vendors, staff and clients that we will continue consultations as we consider any and all changes to the process.

JOURNEY

MADAM SPEAKER

The journey to healthcare reform is never smooth or clear cut and the path often holds challenges and many obstacles along the way. However, The Bahamas has been fortunate to observe and utilize templates of successful healthcare modernization systems from other countries. For many of us who lived, studied or practiced medicine in the region I believe we are better able to compare apples with apples and will forever be grateful for what we have, but I do agree we need to see the way forward from different lenses, find common ground and work together to improve healthcare delivery systems across the country. We all know that the transformation of our healthcare system is essential and requires a strong political will to do so. Short-term changes can sometimes be very uncomfortable because of

multiple priorities with limited funding but we also know that positive changes will be welcomed by all.

MADAM SPEAKER

No doubt, the transformation of our healthcare system in the years to come will be cited as a historical reference. I say this because we on this side are seeking to modernize healthcare in the face of an inherited pre-independence colonial healthcare system that saw the establishment of the three major public health hospitals in The Bahamas, the Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) built in 1953, the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre (SCR) built in 1956 and the Rand Memorial Hospital (RMH) built in Grand Bahama in 1969 as a private hospital and in 1971 became a public healthcare facility currently managed by the PHA.

MADAM SPEAKER

Post-independence, successive governments made significant strides enhancing primary and tertiary healthcare services across the country, the most extensive being the critical care block expansion at the PMH at a cost of just under 100 million

dollars, money well spent. Our prime minister noted in the Budget Overview, this 2024/2025 budget is “welcomed by those with their eyes on the long-term growth and prosperity of the nation.” This is how we are **‘Changing the Status Quo.’**

MADAM SPEAKER

Although our initial platform to modernize healthcare in the Bahamas was shelved following our 2017 general election defeat, upon our successful return to government in 2021 after 4 years in opposition we worked on a modern healthcare plan taking into consideration the financial headwinds we faced and economic impact that natural disasters and the Covid19 pandemic had on our healthcare facilities and our local economy. So under the leadership of our Honorable Prime Minister we rolled up our sleeves and started the tedious but necessary rebuilding process.

From day one at the Ministry of Health & Wellness I announced that guided by our Blueprint for Change, we were determined to accomplish our transformative

healthcare agenda. That means we set goals, strategies and aimed at bringing about relevant and sustainable changes in the health sector and our communities.

Madam Speaker We are *'Changing the Status Quo.'*

MADAM SPEAKER

Protection against both communicable and non-communicable diseases stressed the necessity for the modernization of our primary and tertiary healthcare infrastructure. Drawing on evidence-based research, it became apparent that the current hospital designs were inadequate and outdated for effectively managing infectious diseases while also ensuring the seamless operation of other healthcare services. This realization emphasized the need for new, climate-resilient hospitals that incorporate new edge certification designs at clinics and hospitals at new greenfield sites as part of the country's post pandemic preparedness strategy. The upgrading of our clinics to meet the needs of a young growing population in the

communities where they live is an essential mandate of this Davis-Cooper Administration.

MADAM SPEAKER

We can never forget that fresh on the heels of the devastating impact of Hurricane Dorian, the COVID-19 pandemic marked one of the most challenging periods in our nation's history, bringing us, like many developing countries, to our knees. Many lives were lost, including some of our treasured healthcare providers and frontline workers. It is crucial that we never forget this chapter of our history and seek tangible ways to honor the memories of our fallen heroes.

As a survivor of COVID-19, I personally witnessed a healthcare system that was struggling and unable to adequately deliver basic medical services to our people. Serving as the Minister of Health & Wellness during the latter stages of the pandemic presented its own set of challenges. I am proud of our administration's bold policies and persistent action to managing the pandemic while supporting economic growth through scientifically sound Health Services Rules. In hindsight,

the outcomes of our approach demonstrated that we made informed and visionary decisions. Our approach did not shackle our population, it offered a partnership with our people to fight the pandemic.

MADAM SPEAKER

‘Changing the Status Quo means charting a new course. Under proven leadership, we have commenced a master plan to modernize the healthcare infrastructure, aligning it with the 21st-century model essential for Pandemic Prevention Preparedness response, as advocated by the World Health Organization. This PLP administration understands the critical need to ensure that we remain prepared so far as it is possible for any other global health threat. It is not something we on this side will not play politics with and I trust the side opposite knows better. It will not be about us wielding power over our people but rather protecting people across our country for any natural disaster. Our approach will be a transparent, consultative and equitable approach.

MADAM SPEAKER

Evidence based research helps to create public health policy and the policy unit in my Ministry, completed a crucial assessment of our public health functions, becoming the first Caribbean nation to do so under the revised PAHO methodology. While the results were challenging but expected, they guided our resource allocation in this fiscal budget to strengthen our health systems. This assessment was recognized as a best practice, leading to The Bahamas co-chairing the Economic and Health Dialogue in the Americas.

MADAM SPEAKER

With your indulgence, I will now outline the details of the way my Ministry is working to support our administration's vision of **'Changing the Status Quo and Changing Lives.'**

INFRASTRUCTURE

MADAM SPEAKER

During his Speech from the Throne 21 days after the Progressive Liberal Party was given the mandate to govern by the good people of The Bahamas, former Governor General Sir Cornelius Smith read the following and I quote:

“The COVID-19 crisis has exposed many of the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of our healthcare system. My government will make investments in healthcare infrastructure throughout The Bahamas and ensure that Family Island clinics are properly equipped, inclusive of the capacity for telemedicine.

My government will build new hospitals in New Providence and Grand Bahama.

My government will prioritize public health and wellness initiatives and will move aggressively to introduce catastrophic healthcare insurance to make healthcare more affordable, and to address the mental health issues in our country.

My government also recognizes, applauds, and expresses its gratitude to the doctors, nurses, other frontline workers and volunteers for their meritorious and selfless service during this pandemic.”

MADAM SPEAKER

In September 2021, The Ministry of Health became the Ministry of Health & Wellness reflecting in its name a commitment to placing greater emphasis and action on wellness and wellbeing programming across The Bahamas.

MADAM SPEAKER

In our efforts to ***‘Change the Status Quo,’*** our focus extends beyond renovations at the depressing di-lapidated healthcare facilities we found across our Commonwealth on our election to office in 2021. We are still conducting assessments as we renovate, striving to construct facilities that better cater to the evolving demands of Bahamians everywhere that we are privileged to serve. This

transformation aims to positively impact the lives of Bahamians everywhere and enhance the working environment and experience of our dedicated, hard-working staff. We are building for the future. Yes, we are changing the Status Quo.

MADAM SPEAKER

From day one, our transformation to push forward in addressing the challenges posed by the deterioration of clinics across our country was activated, and after two and half years in office I am happy to report that we are 95% on the way towards completion.

MADAM SPEAKER

It's been a long hard journey to get where we are today, but expect an **invitation** soon to attend the official reopening of 4 of our 6 newly renovated polyclinics in Nassau - the Ann's Town Clinic, the Elizabeth Estates Clinic, Blue Hills Clinic and the South Beach Health Centre. In-fact, there will be more invitations to come as my Ministry has intensified renovation and infrastructural efforts that would lead to the ground breaking on three new health facilities – one for Mangrove Cay Andros,

another for Palmetto Point Eleuthera, and one for the communities of Coconut Grove, Yellow Elder and Big Pond. Member of Central and South Eleuthera, I saw the social media clip about the facility my ministry is renting in Point. To set the record straight on that clinic, my team was in Palmetto Point and did approach the land lord about him making additional repairs and those discussions are continuing. But the wonderful people of Palmetto Point can rest assured we are close to breaking ground on a new state of the art facility in their community. I am also pleased to report after my visit to Eleuthera a few weeks ago my team will complete the review of the engineering report of the old Governor's Harbour Clinic in order to repair that facility.

MADAM SPEAKER

When we came to office in 2021, the condition of our Family Island Clinics was in such a state of disrepair that it was impossible to undertake all of the improvements at the same time. Over the last two and a half years, fifty of our ninety-plus public

health facilities throughout our archipelago are currently under active renovation or completed.

Just ask clinic users in Lower Bogue, the Bluff, James Cistern, Miriam Greene, Nicholls' Town, Fox Town, Eight Mile Rock, West End, Bimini and other renovated clinics their responses will reflect their appreciation for the improved environments.

MADAM SPEAKER

We are not only ensuring that through the Department of Public Health our primary healthcare infrastructure is ready for the 21st Century, but through the Public Hospitals Authority (PHA) we are also ensuring that our tertiary healthcare facilities keep pace.

In October 2023, the Public Hospitals Authority executed a sales agreement for the Evolve building located on Rosetta Street to be used as the new accommodations for the outpatient rehabilitation therapy services currently housed in the General

Hardware Building on Collins Avenue. Renovation works to ensure the appropriate outfitting of the building as a rehabilitation clinical space are anticipated to conclude during the current budget cycle. This year the Observation and Pediatric areas of the ongoing PMH Emergency Department (Urgent & Emergency Care Project) renovation were also completed. The larger project continues into the next phase of the project life cycle. Just last month, the new Blood Bank was officially opened at its new location on 1st Terrace Centerville.

At PMH, plans for the East Wing block entail substantial renovation work to the basement, Children's Ward, Eye Ward and Eye Theatre (equipment has been procured for this service). The renovated building will also include a 30-bed Dialysis Center. With the involvement of internal stakeholders, the planning stage is completed and a tender for construction is expected to be issued shortly. Remedial works are planned for the flooring in select clinical spaces within the Critical Care Block to mitigate against potential safety hazards.

MADAM SPEAKER

Completion of the Rand Memorial's Radiology room (Fluoroscopy) in March 2024 has expanded diagnostic imaging capacity for the Northern Bahamas. The PHA is undertaking renovations - inclusive of builder's works and replacing furniture and equipment - to the clinics at Grand Cay and Sweetings Cay to improve the physical conditions of those clinics and the adjacent accommodations. The modular units at PMH and the Rand are finally completed and we are ready for the hurricane season. Construction of the new Rand Morgue is provisionally scheduled for completion in August 2024. The required equipment is being manufactured by the international vendor(s) and will be shipped once completed.

MADAM SPEAKER

The Member for East Grand Bahama while on his feet had a lot to say about clinics and infrastructure in East Grand Bahama after demitting office. Creating the impression that when he sat in the chair as the Minister for Grand Bahama a lot was done. Let me set the record straight that the clinics for East Grand Bahama were not operational and Sweetings Cay was left out of the mix. The two clinics he made

reference to McClain's Town and High Rock were not renovated or built by the then FNM government but by an NGO called direct relief. This was a philanthropic effort of an NGO so let's give credit where credit it is due. I say that were it not for this USA based NGO's after Hurricane Dorian little or nothing would have happened and the people of East Grand Bahama need to know the truth.

As a matter of fact, the people of east Grand Bahama are getting more attention for our administration that they ever got when the member was in the chair as minister for Grand Bahama or when the former member for East Grand Bahama was the minister of State for finance.

MADAM SPEAKER

All talk and no action; 5 ministers on Grand Bahama and little or nothing to show. Now they are here to lecture this PLP administration about a plan. I say to the member for East Grand Bahama there is a credibility issue and your ideas are not new but recycled ideas from a failed administration. What about your tech hub for

Freeport that attracted one real investor who left the country highly upset with the former administration who made many empty promises?

They simply could not deliver

MADAM SPEAKER

Changing the Status Quo and Changing Lives means realigning relationships. The Grand Bahama Health Services (GBHS) has once again partnered with Direct Relief for the construction of the new Cold Chain Storage facility for Vaccines and all supplies requiring controlled temperature conditions. The allocation is to cover the building and mechanical requirements. The building will be located on a Greenfield site adjacent to the Hawksbill Clinic. Repairs and renovations to Davies House will facilitate the provision of Wound Care, Mammography and Ophthalmology outpatient services for the Grand Bahama population. I am also pleased to advise that new mammography equipment has been ordered for both the PMH and the Rand Memorial hospital.

MADAM SPEAKER

Even as I present this Budget Contribution, the PHA is actively seeking alternate accommodations for the relocation of the clinical psychology services at Sandilands Rehabilitation Center. Once a suitable space has been identified, renovation works will be undertaken to ensure the appropriate outfitting of the building as a clinical psychology space as part of bringing into force aspects of the new mental health act. We are excited that the clinical psychology staff will occupy their new accommodations during the 2024/2025 fiscal year.

The Public Hospitals Authority is also investing in several smaller capital projects to improve the physical environment of the Medical Block which will no doubt enhance both patient and staff satisfaction within those spaces. A sizeable investment is being made in warehouse cool storage at the Supply Management Agency to support the availability and efficacy of vital life-saving medical and surgical medicines and supplies.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORM

MADAM SPEAKER

This ongoing upgrade process at health facilities across the country is historic and clear evidence of our administration's commitment to renovate and transform health facilities across the country to a standard that will allow us to deliver quality universal primary care. All will benefit from these works facilitated by an IDB loan facility. All clinic locations will receive Internet connectivity and see the implementation of a 'single medical record' system, allowing the ability for us to monitor pharmacies and the administrative arm efficiently, together with the necessary cyber security protections.

I am happy to report to this Honorable House that my Ministry has completed testing of its digital communications platform which will enhance the delivery of health-related information, staff communications, emergency support communications to patients, staff and health stakeholders. The platform has been successfully deployed in 6 DPH facilities and 1 PHA facility as well as at the Ministry's

headquarters on Meeting Street. During this initial roll out the platform will further be established in 35 clinics throughout New Providence, Grand Bahama Health Services and the Family Islands with the remaining clinics to follow.

MADAM SPEAKER

As part of our broader digitization initiative, I am pleased to announce that nine clinic pharmacies in the Family Islands and New Providence have already undergone automation. This forward-looking step is streamlining operations and significantly enhancing the efficiency of medication management. These advancements underscore our commitment to modernize our healthcare infrastructure, and promote patient safety. As we move forward, we remain dedicated to fostering a healthcare environment that is not only efficient but, above all, prioritizes the health and safety of the Bahamian people.

MADAM SPEAKER

This leads me to the pivotal digital transformation journey of our health system. We are making swift progress in executing a medium-term Information Systems for

Health (IS4H) Strategic Plan, which encompasses the establishment of a National Telehealth Program. A dedicated team, in collaboration with key national health stakeholders, is driving the execution of this initiative. In support of our efforts, the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) contributed to the Ministry of Health & Wellness's telehealth equipment, including portable ultrasounds, electrographs, spot-check monitors, and height and weight measuring equipment. These resources are instrumental in the implementation of a telehealth pilot project in selected Family Islands.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude for the support from PAHO/WHO and their commitment to advancing the digital transformation of The Bahamas' health system through the implementation of the IS4H framework.

TWO NEW HOSPITALS

MADAM SPEAKER

It is without question that an indication of our administration's commitment to transforming healthcare is no clearer illuminated than in the announcement of our goal to build not one but two new hospitals in the country. As Minister I have not just come with my hat in my hand, we have moved soil and dug trenches and laid foundations - as is the case in Grand Bahama and in New Providence we have found financing and consulted with the Bahamian people through town hall meetings.

MADAM SPEAKER

I am pleased to update you on the significant progress being made on the Freeport Health Campus a vision that did not die on leaving office in 2017. I am pleased to report that the first phase is on track for completion by June 2025, with the second phase, the 4 story tower, set for tender in early September of this year. Construction of this design-build facility will break ground this year after the tender process is completed and a contract is awarded. This new state-of-the-art facility on completion will offer primary, acute care and tertiary health services for the northern Bahamas. This is governance putting plans into action. Yes, after many

years the residents of Grand Bahama will finally get the new hospital. Finally, a facility where they will be able to get the quality healthcare services they truly deserve.

MADAM SPEAKER

On the horizon is the ground-breaking day for the new state of the art hospital facility on the newly purposed New Providence health campus, to be situated on approximately 50 acres east of the New Providence Highway here in the capital about 8 miles west of the PMH. This new hospital will be a specialty hospital for maternity, pediatric and adolescent care. It will also house a blood bank and national morgue and state of the art diagnostics. This new hospital is indeed a prime example of the government '**Changing The Status Quo**, and thereby **Changing Lives**'.

MADAM SPEAKER

The Princess Margaret Hospital is the premiere tertiary healthcare facility in our country. It is embedded in the history and development of our country, but this 71-year-old facility that has outgrown its capacity to keep in step with the population demands. The Dorsett Report released in 1999 said the facility could not keep pace with international standards; that was 25 years ago. That was when our population was approximately around 320,000 imagine now when the hospital records a footpath of almost 100-thousand clients per year.

MADAM SPEAKER

There are those who would for political expediency challenge the building of a new hospital and suggest that we just upgrade the existing structure. We are conducting improvements at PMH and further renovations and expansion is set for this budget cycle and others to come. The reality is that if we want to transform healthcare we must move in a direction and along a pace of modernization. The need for a hospital that offers specialty services is an idea whose time has come, in-fact it is overdue.

MADAM SPEAKER

During and post COVID19 like many countries we have recorded challenges with maternal and infant mortality ratios. The need to increase health resources for women and children is critical for the overall improvement in the health of our population. This newly purposed 200 bed specialty hospital will provide: women's health services; child & adolescent health services; support for molecular medicine services; act as the headquarters for new technologies and research and medicine oversight; provide for the delivery of services to visitors and act as a teaching hospital and a shelter during and after any major disaster.

The hospital will include an expansion of services to support: Maternal, infant and child services, including intensive care units; Laboratory services; Diagnostic and interventional imaging services; Day surgeries and minor procedures; Modern imaging department and introduce CT scan and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to the public sector; National pathology service (mass casualties); and a Telemedicine hub for the integration of our family island clinics. Yes, all spaces left

behind at the PMH will be renovated to expand medical and surgical services and increase bed space for adult patients.

MADAM SPEAKER

This new hospital is not something we pulled out of a hat. This new hospital is the amalgamation of research, planning, consultation and an unwavering commitment to seeing this project through. My Ministry has conducted two town halls to facilitate public discussion and feedback regarding the plans for the New Providence Hospital. Both town halls were well attended, and the public was fully advised and engaged. The next step will be the town hall meeting by the Ministry of the Environment, tentatively scheduled for the 20th of this month. We encourage residents to once again come out to listen to the experts and voice their concerns. Additional town halls by the respective Ministries and agencies will also be held. If all proceeds as planned, ground preparation is expected to begin in the first quarter of the next fiscal period.

MADAM SPEAKER

These healthcare infrastructural initiatives undertaken by my Ministry are not just about construction; they are about changing and transforming lives. By ensuring that Bahamians have access to well-equipped facilities in their communities, particularly in the Family Islands, we are enhancing the overall healthcare experience offered in the public sector. This approach provides opportunities for Bahamians to live and work here at home or return to their ancestral communities without concerns about compromising their access to essential health services. Infrastructure is just one of the seven key areas my Ministry is actively addressing to revamp and strengthen the healthcare system.

MANPOWER RESOURCES

MADAM SPEAKER

Our mission at public clinics and hospitals is to provide quality care and accessible services to all in need. Many of our healthcare workers however are faced with both physical and mental exhaustion due in part to manpower shortages. I am very aware of and sensitive to the frustration and fatigue of our hard working healthcare workers. A part of this challenge **Madam Speaker**, is the ongoing competitive recruiting of healthcare personnel by developed countries and this is an issue that is affecting not only our country but the entire region. This was also a topic that was discussed a few weeks ago during my yearly visit at the World Health Assembly and CARACOM Ministers of Health Meeting.

MADAM SPEAKER

This year's budget allocation reflects a strategic alignment with our key priorities. Resources have been directed towards the Nurse Internship Program, post-graduate specialty training, the Trained Clinical Nurse Program, nursing recruitment and retention and initiatives such as the Nursing Cadet and Nursing Grant Program.

In this regard I am pleased to report that:

- 100 nursing graduate from UB have been on boarded since July 2023 and looking ahead, we anticipate welcoming another 50 dedicated registered nurses to the program in June/July 2024.
- post-graduate specialty training programs are flourishing, with 37 newly certified Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses and 23 Midwives actively pursuing completion of their training.
- promotion exercises aimed to recognize and reward the dedication of our existing nursing staff and doctors are ongoing.
- 30% increase in the stipend for graduate nurse interns to recognize their invaluable contributions.
- 30% increase in students enrolling in the Nursing Cadet Program.
- A second cohort of the TCN program is scheduled to commence this month as well as a Pharmacy Technician program in July 2024.

- the introduction of the Renal Nurse Program is on the horizon, and plans are in motion for the initiation of an Accident and Emergency Nurse Program and the Community nursing Program.
- Efforts are also underway to train more nurses for the National Transplant Program and specialty allied healthcare workers

MADAM SPEAKER

Additionally, the PHA launched its inaugural 18-month Trained Clinical Nurse (TCN) Certificate program through the PHA Academy in compliance with national regulatory requirements. This initiative will assist the PHA and the DPH in meeting the need for increased providers of basic nursing care, consistent with the training and scope of practice. This has the potential to transform the delivery of care in supporting the Staff Nurse's role and function, significantly improve patient satisfaction, and ultimately achieve better health outcomes across the country.

In recognition of our longstanding challenges with shortages in critical areas, the PHA Academy is in collaboration with universities to assist in training the personnel that our healthcare system requires. Bahamas Baptist University College has been engaged to facilitate a Bachelors Pharmacy program provisionally scheduled to commence with Pre-pharmacy in August of this year. Similarly, the PHA Academy is collaborating with international universities to facilitate training for other Allied Health programs such as Rehabilitation, public health and Laboratory Technology.

MADAM SPEAKER

The progress we have made underscores our commitment to building a robust and resilient health workforce. We will continue to invest in our doctors, nurses, medical and allied health professionals. We will continue to agitate for an improved process for efficiently onboarding new recruits and accelerating promotion exercises.

Further while these programmes are being undertaken, we have also moved to supplement the shortages in our human resources through hiring internationally.

More than 50 recruited healthcare professionals from Cuba and Ghana have successfully been on boarded since October last year. Many of these professionals have been deployed between the Princess Margaret Hospital, Rand Memorial Hospital and Family Island clinics. The recruitments include epidemiologists, nurses, lab technicians, X-ray technicians, physiotherapists, nurses, and biomedical engineers.

MADAM SPEAKER

Historically, discussions have centered around the need for more physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists. These professionals are undoubtedly essential, forming the foundation of our healthcare delivery. However, today, I must emphasize the broader spectrum of healthcare professionals required to support our system effectively. We urgently need more mental health counsellors, dietitians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, audiologists, optometrists, optical technicians, podiatrists, pharmacy technicians, dental assistants, oral hygienists, laboratory technicians, medical technologists, medical

records clerks, patient care assistants and technicians, respiratory physiologists, radiographers, sonographers, ECG and echo cardiology technicians, and biomedical technicians.

I would go further and state, our needs extend beyond clinical roles. We also require human resource managers, accountants and finance officers, administrators, project officers and managers, clerical staff, epidemiologists, biostatisticians, data analysts, business analysts, health economists, scientists, IT specialists, computer programmers, cybersecurity specialists, researchers, policy writers, lawyers, and health planners. We encouraged all persons especially high school graduates to consider a career in any one of the fields mentioned. All are required in healthcare and discussions with the ministry of education, UB and all accredited post graduate institutions throughout the country to establish some of these specialty curriculum to prepare our population for many of these exciting careers in healthcare.

MADAM SPEAKER

A strong, health workforce is essential, and we face challenges in attracting and retaining necessary talent. To address this, we have expanded the UWI subvention scholarship to include more health-related disciplines. Additionally, we have established a National Human Resources for Health Committee to explore workforce planning and development. Collaborations with PAHO, Dalhousie University, and Harvard University are ongoing, with budget support this year to make some changes. We have also partnered with the University of the Bahamas for a comprehensive health workforce compensation study, **marking** a significant milestone. These initiatives are vital for developing a resilient health workforce for our nation and my Ministry's policy unit is committed to do just that.

MADAM SPEAKER

Health is not just the absence of disease or infirmity, it encompasses physical, mental and social well-being. The value of changing and saving lives is priceless, however when you are trying to manage all aspects of government a price must be

allocated and this 2024-2025 budget reflects the estimated expenditure and capital allocations which I will go into great details when we discuss the budget heads.

2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

MADAM SPEAKER

As regional trailblazers in the field of universal healthcare we intend to repeal the 2016 NHI Act which has served its purpose. Extensive stakeholder consultations on the new NHI Bill has been done and we intend to lay this new NHI bill in this place in a few weeks and shortly after debate and pass it and bring it into force. Increasing diagnostic and lab capabilities, creating a sustainable healthcare program, expanding prescription, medication and pharmacy services through the National Drug Prescription Plan and more will be accounted for in this new piece of legislation.

PHARMACY

MADAM SPEAKER

Our commitment to ensuring the safety and integrity of medications within our healthcare system is evident in the drafting of four new regulations and the amendment of three existing ones. One of the pivotal regulations under consideration is in the area of pharmacovigilance. Pharmacovigilance is indispensable in our efforts to detect, assess, and address drug-related challenges. It serves as a guardian of public health, ensuring the safety of medications dispensed to our citizens. Noteworthy among the proposed changes are regulations aimed at exercising greater control and monitoring of controlled substances. We understand the importance of refining the process for the importation of controlled medications, recognizing the potential risks involved and these regulations are intended to provide the necessary stringent oversight in their importation and prescription.

Further to this, falsified and counterfeit medications know no borders and have infiltrated our local market. Using these medications cause detrimental effects on

health and can even contribute to premature deaths. To address this head-on, my Ministry will seek to bring to this place a Pharmacovigilance Bill which will heighten the regulatory framework around prescription medications – thereby giving greater assurance that the medication your physician prescribes, and the medication received and taken actually does what it is intended to do.

MADAM SPEAKER

A few weeks ago I laid in this Honorable House a compendium of bills to make way remove Cannabis of the dangerous drug list and legalize medical Cannabis in the country. We intend to debate and pass those bills before the summer break, and to enact them shortly thereafter so that the necessary steps can be taken to establish the Cannabis Authority and implement the necessary protocols to bring the legislation into force. We are excited about this new form of therapy being added to the current medical treatments in the country. So as a responsible administration we will address them all head on in a responsible and transparent way.

MENTAL HEALTH

MADAM SPEAKER

Since the passing of the Mental Health Act, 2022, my Ministry and constituent agencies have been diligently working to implement its provisions. We are at the point where we will be putting into force several components of the new Act. Our priority was to ensure that there was sufficient trained staff to support the delivery of health services at the community level. We have recently integrated 17 psychiatric trained nurses into community services with two deployed to the Family Islands. These nurses have received training in psychological first aid and are being mentored to strengthen community and district mental health services.

In preparation for the Act's enforcement, we've collaborated with law enforcement agencies and peace officers to develop protocols for interacting with individuals displaying signs of mental illness. This includes how to approach persons, how to control the environment, what to look out for and how to seek further assistance when considering the need for referrals. The agencies involved are the Royal

Bahamas Police Force, the Royal Bahamas Defense Force, the Bahamas Department of Correctional Services, the Bahamas Customs Department and the Bahamas Department of Immigration. Coupled with the development and adoption of these protocols are training sessions for the staff and recruits in psychological first aid by our partners the Bahamas Psychological Association. Over 230 officers have been trained in psychological first aid, ensuring appropriate response and referral procedures.

To promote mental health awareness in workplaces, seminars were conducted for Ministry and Department of Public Health staff, along with media personnel.

Additionally, efforts have been made to support caregivers and provide coping techniques for trauma-exposed media personnel.

MADAM SPEAKER

In response to the lingering impacts of Hurricane Dorian and the pandemic, we have initiated a novel approach to strengthen community resilience. The Mental

Health Programming Unit is establishing connected pathways throughout the Family Islands to provide local mental health resources and support. Three pathways have been established in Grand Bahama, Abaco and Cat Island, with plans to extend this network across the archipelago. Additionally, we have launched a mental health peer counseling program in secondary schools and are plan to hire a child health psychologist to support various health services and initiatives.

PEOPLE CENTERED SERVICES

MADAM SPEAKER

Eye Health has been a longstanding challenge in The Bahamas, but it is one we are taking head-on. To date, nine cohorts of approximately 400 Bahamians have benefited from ophthalmic surgery via a technical cooperation agreement between The Bahamas and the Republic of Cuba. Additional cohorts are being planned for this year's budget.

“Bright Action”, a Chinese initiative to provide cataract surgery for up to 300 public patients is scheduled to occur early in the new fiscal year. Similarly, as with two past initiatives with the Chinese government, China will provide ophthalmologists, optometrists, and nurses along with the necessary equipment and supplies to perform ophthalmic surgeries. These procedures will be conducted at the PMH Eye Theatre and will see Bahamian health professionals working alongside their Chinese counterparts for transference of knowledge and skills. Both programs are free of charge to those eligible for surgical intervention and funding for this program is covered in head 60 line item **2251123 the ministry’s catastrophic fund**

NHIA

MADAM SPEAKER

National health insurance like NIB was birthed in the loins of the PLP. Universal Health Care is part of a social assistance benefit that countries around the world

through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals have committed to deliver by the year 2030. The Bahamas intends to achieve this mandate by way of NHI.

As the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) enters its seventh year, I am pleased to report that significant progress has been made towards achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). The NHIA program has grown exponentially, outpacing projected performance in enrollment, community engagement, and technological advancements. This year, NHIA enrolled over 163,000 beneficiaries, with the support of a strong network of 147 physicians and 89 healthcare facilities, including 30 facilities on the Family Islands.

The phased implementation of the National Health Insurance program allowed for health inequities to be identified and addressed. It is now a proven vehicle for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and transforming The Bahamas' health sector. The NHI Bahamas program has become a flagship and best practice model for the implementation of UHC in the Caribbean sub region.

Having enrolled almost half of the Bahamian population, NHI provides people-centered care and contributes greatly to ensuring healthy lives and the well-being at all ages. In 2023, NHI welcomed 18,873 new beneficiaries, while 1,400 mothers benefited from our maternity care services, a testament to our commitment to maternal and child health services. There was a significant increase in program utilization with more than 101,000 annual primary care visits, a significant accomplishment in a population of less than 400,000 people.

These statistics and accompanying performance reports result from NHIA's technological investments and advances in adopting an electronic health record (EHR) system. The EHR tool, which provides functionality for providers and patients, has improved the efficiency and coordination of care across our network while providing access to data that allows for informed public health decision-making.

Through a progressive funding model, the NHIA program has minimized financial risk for the healthcare sector while simultaneously increasing access to essential healthcare services throughout the archipelago of the Bahamas.

Recognizing the intrinsic link between health and well-being, NHIA has facilitated and promoted numerous wellness community initiatives through the introduction of beneficiary education engagements, family-friendly workout sessions, a community farmers' market, and a backyard garden project with a local primary school. These initiatives promote healthier lifestyles, strengthen community involvement, and enhance local food security. Creating a platform for wellness at all levels that reflects our holistic approach to health and wellness.

The NHI program relies on our dedicated providers. We are proud that 95% of our providers would recommend NHIA to other physicians, demonstrating satisfaction within our network. In the upcoming year, we will focus on ensuring financial stability, expanding benefits, and refining program requirements to continue to provide exceptional support to our Providers and Beneficiaries.

MADAM SPEAKER

As I wind down It would be impossible for me to close my contribution to this year's Budget Debate without highlighting the critical need for a personal partnership with the Bahamian people on the state of healthcare in our country.

A staggering 80% of cases managed at our tertiary medical care facilities are attributed to the medical complications associated with chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, and renal failure.

Many of the persons in our hospital beds are repeat clients because of poorly managed NCDs. The financial burden on the Bahamian taxpayer in addressing patients afflicted by these conditions is astronomical. What makes this situation even more disheartening is that the majority of these illnesses are preventable. Yet, due to undisciplined lifestyles, our bodies bear the consequences.

While the construction of new hospitals is undoubtedly essential for improving capacity, efficiency, and comfort, it is imperative that we take responsibility for the

root sources of our illnesses. The goal of all of us in healthcare is to encourage Bahamians to recognize the importance of modifying their dietary and physical activity lifestyles. Information sessions, physical exercise activities and community engagement for all ages are just a glimpse of the ongoing efforts. We encourage all Bahamians to self-evaluate and work at achieving optimal health. My personal journey to good health prove that small steps can bring on big gains, but each step in the right direction is a step towards a better quality of life.

CONCLUSION

FINALLY, MADAM SPEAKER

As I prepare to take my seat, I would like to thank the hard-working staff across the healthcare sector who continue to give good service to our employer, the Bahamian people. Over the last twenty-nine months the seeds laid in the fertile ground by this administration have started to spring. Our work is not done yet and till the soil because we have been assured that with God on our side our labor will not be in vain.

MADAM SPEAKER

We are *'Changing the Status Quo, and it is Changing Lives.'* May God continue to bless you and members of this Honorable House and the people of this country that we are privilege to serve.

Tall Pines supports this 2024-2025 Budget.

THANK YOU.

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