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**For Immediate Release**

## **WHY INVOLVE MEN IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH?**

Involving men in matters related to their own Reproductive Health and that of their partner or partners is important, as this influential group can significantly determine the health outcomes in a relationship. It is recognised that men's risky behaviours can result in the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to women who by virtue of their reproductive physiology are more susceptible to lacerations during intercourse, allowing for ready transmission of the virus to the woman. With this transmission pregnant women can, in turn, pass on the virus to their unborn child as well.

Additionally, in many engagements where the men determine the use of contraceptive methods by themselves or by their partners, the onus is on them to embrace the various methods, creating desired behaviour change that will keep pace with their already **impressive knowledge** of many methods. Men need to be involved, as health providers realise gender affects sexual behaviour, reproductive decision-making and ultimately reproductive health. Key to this assessment is the communication between partners in the discussion of reproductive health needs including pregnancy, birth spacing, contraceptive use and their role in parenting.

Admittedly, the hesitancy on the part of males to actively prioritise and become involved to safeguard their reproductive health, can perhaps be attributed to the skewed emphasis of programmes to meeting the needs of women and children – an imbalance which is now being corrected. Aside from the condom and vasectomy, Jamaica's men have not accepted any other contraceptive option for their own use, with some reporting allergic reactions to condoms and hence their non-use of the method.

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## Why involve men.../2 of 2

Undoubtedly, the NFPB recognises the role of the health provider and the need to keep them updated through continuing education, on the range of services that are available to male clients. These very important services are screening, clinical diagnosis and treatment undergirded by readily available information.

Health providers are trained to be open to many and varied reactions from males when they attempt to broach the subject of health care as it pertains to their reproductive health. In a society where manliness is revered, males are not the easiest persons to convince that sensitive matters such as looking after their Sexual and Reproductive Health are equally as important as how good they look on the outside. The programme is heartened by the positive reactions from male client who have already availed themselves of information on reproductive health, as it augurs well for a programme that seeks to improve the health status of men.

Effectively communicating with males about the health services necessitates speaking their language, going where the men can be found and convincing them of the heightened benefits to be derived from utilising health services.

Health providers will continue to provide the invaluable link reaching men across the country who, for one reason or another, have not recognised their importance in the success of reproductive health programmes. After all, men have an acute power to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and unmet need for family planning, and dramatically slow the spread of STIs.

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