GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE VINCENT O. WHEATLEY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE FIFTH SITTING OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTH HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS WEDNESDAY, 21ST OCTOBER, 2026 A Vision for the Future of Healthcare

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Madam Speaker, healthcare is one of the Government’s greatest responsibilities. Every resident of The Virgin Islands deserves access to safe, high-quality, affordable, and sustainable healthcare, both today and for future generations.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Social Development recognises that healthcare must continue to evolve to meet the needs of our people. Our population is ageing, chronic diseases are increasing, medical technology continues to advance, and the cost of healthcare continues to rise. These realities require deliberate action, careful planning, and a clear vision for the future.

For this reason, the Ministry has embarked on a comprehensive programme of health system reform. Our objective is to ensure that every resident has access to safe, high-quality, and sustainable healthcare, while ensuring that every public dollar invested delivers the greatest possible value for patients, taxpayers, and

future generations.

This work is not theoretical, Madam Speaker, it is already underway. Across the health system, the Ministry is advancing reforms focused on sustainable healthcare financing, strengthening the National Health Insurance programme, improving governance and accountability, modernising health information, and developing more integrated models of care.

Madam Speaker, the first priority is sustainable healthcare financing. The Government already makes a significant investment in healthcare. The Ministry's responsibility is to ensure that this investment is managed responsibly, transparently, and sustainably. This means strengthening the way healthcare resources are planned, allocated, monitored, and evaluated, so that investment decisions are based on reliable information and deliver measurable value to the public.

A central element of this reform is the proposed transition of the BVI Health Services Authority away from its current global budget arrangements towards a more flexible funding model linked to the services it provides. This will allow the Authority greater flexibility to develop and expand its services, strengthen its financial sustainability, and better fulfil its role in meeting the healthcare needs of the Territory. The transition will be carefully managed to ensure continuity of services and operational stability, while strategies are developed to address the Authority's legacy financial liabilities. Government is also working towards making direct payments to National Health Insurance on behalf of persons exempted from contributions under the Regulations.

The second priority is strengthening the National Health Insurance scheme as the Territory's healthcare financing system. National Health Insurance has expanded access to healthcare locally and overseas, particularly for persons living with chronic illnesses and pre-existing medical conditions. It has also helped to protect families from the financial burden of serious illness.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is working to strengthen the National Health Insurance through improved governance, better information, and stronger accountability. The goal is to ensure that healthcare resources are allocated fairly,

efficiently, and sustainably, and that NHI continues to support access to quality healthcare for the people of The Virgin Islands.

It is important to emphasise that the National Health Insurance and the BVI Health Services Authority are not competing organisations. They are complementary parts of one integrated health system. Each has distinct responsibilities, but both share the same objective: improving the health and well-being of the people of The Virgin Islands. To support closer coordination, work is underway on the Alliance Agreement between NHI and the BVI Health Services Authority. This will provide a clearer basis for joint planning, service delivery, information sharing, financial arrangements and accountability, while respecting the distinct responsibilities of both institutions.

Madam Speaker, the third priority is good governance and accountability. Strong healthcare systems require strong institutions. The Ministry is strengthening governance, financial management, operational reporting, and performance monitoring across the health system. This work is intended to ensure that decisions are based on accurate information, public resources are used efficiently, and healthcare investments produce meaningful improvements in service delivery and health outcomes.

The Ministry has also begun preliminary dialogue with the Trade Department on the development of a regulatory framework for healthcare facilities. Although this work is still at an early stage, the intention is to establish proportionate standards for patient safety, quality of care and clinical governance across public and private health facilities.

The fourth priority is better health intelligence. Good policy depends on good information. The Ministry is working with regional and international partners, including the Pan American Health Organization, CARPHA, and local healthcare stakeholders like the National Health Insurance, to modernise health information systems, strengthen mortality reporting, improve disease surveillance, and enhance the availability of clinical and population health information. This will support better planning, stronger policy development, and more informed decision-making. An important part of this agenda is digital health and interoperability.

Working with PAHO and drawing on its Information Systems for Health approach, the Ministry intends to strengthen the ability of healthcare providers, NHI and the Ministry to exchange the information needed for their respective responsibilities, safely and securely.

The focus is on connecting and improving the systems already in use, with appropriate safeguards for confidentiality and authorised access. This approach also provides the foundation for population-based health registries, including a national cancer registry.

Building these registries within a common information architecture, rather than as isolated systems, will support disease surveillance, prevention, service planning and evaluation, while making them more sustainable over time.

Madam Speaker, the fifth priority is the development of modern models of care. The Ministry is working to build a more integrated health system, where patients are supported across the full continuum of care, from prevention and screening to diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and long-term follow-up. This means ensuring that patients receive the right care, at the right time, and in the most appropriate setting. It also means strengthening local services, while building partnerships with recognised centres of excellence for highly specialised care that cannot be provided locally.

Beyond the overseas provider network supported by NHI, the Ministry is seeking to develop stronger institutional and clinical relationships, where appropriate, with the National Health Service in England and other international partners. These links can support specialist referrals, clinical advice, professional development and more coordinated care before and after overseas treatment, while strengthening local capacity. The care of cancer patients provides an important example of this approach. The Ministry is advancing a comprehensive cancer strategy that brings together prevention, early detection, strengthened local services, and partnerships for specialised treatment and support.

The objective is not simply to respond to cancer when it is diagnosed, but to improve prevention, promote earlier detection, and ensure that patients have access to coordinated care throughout their journey.

The Ministry is continuing its work with the Pan American Health Organization on the Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy. Building on the Territory's achievements in HPV vaccination, the programme will strengthen HPV screening, early detection, timely treatment and follow-up. Work on the national implementation plan is progressing, with further stakeholder consultation required before it is finalised.

The Ministry is also working with PAHO on the HEARTS approach to improve the prevention, detection and management of hypertension and diabetes in primary healthcare. This work is intended to support more consistent clinical protocols, cardiovascular risk assessment, ongoing follow-up and better monitoring of treatment outcomes, helping to reduce avoidable complications of chronic disease. Alongside these clinical initiatives, BVI Moves and the Eat Well Guide provide a practical focus for promoting healthier living across the Territory. The Ministry intends to work with schools, workplaces, community organisations and other partners to take these initiatives into the community, encouraging regular physical activity, healthier eating and lasting changes in everyday habits.

Madam Speaker, one such community engagement initiative is the upcoming BVI Wellness Fest, scheduled for Saturday, 7th November, 2026, at Queen Elizabeth II Park. The event will bring residents together to experience wellness in its many forms, including physical activity, healthy eating, health screenings, education, mental well-being, and community connection. I therefore take this opportunity to invite everyone to join us from 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for a day of activities focused on promoting healthier lifestyles and encouraging greater attention to our overall well-being.

Work on national age-based screening guidance will complement these efforts by supporting prevention and earlier intervention.

Madam Speaker, these initiatives are not isolated projects. They are part of one integrated programme of reform designed to improve health outcomes, strengthen public confidence, and ensure the long-term sustainability of healthcare in The Virgin Islands. Some of this work will take time. It will require collaboration across Government, statutory bodies, healthcare professionals, regional and international partners, and the wider community. It will also require difficult decisions to be

guided by evidence, accountability, and the best interests of patients.

Madam Speaker, the future of healthcare in The Virgin Islands will not be defined by individual projects alone. It will be defined by strong partnerships, sound governance, responsible financing, reliable information, and a health system that places patients at the centre of every decision.

Our objective is not simply to spend more on healthcare. It is to ensure that every investment in healthcare delivers better health outcomes, better value for money, and a stronger, more sustainable health system for everyone who lives in The Virgin Islands.

That is our vision.

That is the work now underway.

And that is this Government’s commitment to the people of The Virgin Islands.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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