



CARICOM COMPETITION COMMISSION

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Press Release

CCC Committed to Competitive Markets and Consumer Protection in the CARICOM Region During the Coronavirus Pandemic

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is an unprecedented challenge for the small economies of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). With Member States closing borders, recommending social distancing and closure of main economic activities such as dining out, “staycations” and other community gatherings, it is fair to say that COVID - 19 has not only impacted the very social fabric of Member States but also commercial and consumer welfare within the Region.

It is natural that small to medium businesses would be required to scale down their operations to protect employees. This results in disruptions in the delivery of services and products to consumers. There have also been notable surges in the demand for groceries, personal protective equipment, and healthcare items in recent weeks across the Region, leading to shortages in supplies of these products. These demand and supply shocks have invariably led to price increases throughout the Member States, to the detriment of their most economically vulnerable consumers (i.e. the impoverished). The misinformed are also now susceptible to marketing ploys for goods or services claiming to cure, treat or prevent COVID 19.

The CARICOM Competition Commission (CCC) believes that through its regional competition and consumer mandates within the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (RTC), the challenges to commercial and consumer welfare associated with COVID-19 can be minimized. The CCC’s two main priorities are always: ensuring consumers in the region benefit from competitive markets through competition advocacy and enforcement; and promoting the protection of the health and safety of consumers in the Member States.

The Commission is of the view that the sale and/or promotion of fraudulent products or services that promise to treat, cure or prevent COVID 19 is a threat to the regional public health and prohibited under the national consumer protection and/or other relevant national legislation in the region.

The CCC further affirms that anti-competitive business conduct aimed at taking advantage of consumers by restricting access or supply to, or excessively raising or maintaining high prices of necessary goods and other items used to protect consumers from COVID 19, is prohibited under the Community Competition Policy and national competition laws in the Member States that have enacted such laws.

To ensure that regional public health is secured and competition in the markets for the supply of goods and items used to protect consumers from COVID 19 are maintained, the CCC will collaborate with its regional partners, such as national competition and consumer protection authorities, sector regulators, non-government consumer organisations, and other regional institutions to:

- **Engage** in competition advocacy to encourage firms to behave responsibly in pricing their products during this pandemic
- **Ensure and/or facilitate** communication by relevant authorities with businesses and consumers to report sale and pricing practices that are suspected of infringing national competition or consumer protection laws.
- **Monitor** markets as to whether firms are engaging in conduct which substantially impedes effective competition in markets in key product markets.
- **Encourage** direct enforcement action is taken against firms that individually or collectively engage in anti-competitive business conduct. For example, firms colluding to fix or charge excessive prices for key products or marketing fraudulent products that claim to prevent, cure or treat COVID 19.
- **Advocate** for the fast track implementation of national competition and consumer protection laws in Member States without such laws to assist in the ability of agencies to respond effectively to unscrupulous sales and pricing practices in the region.
- **Promote** a region-wide monitoring policy for prices of critical products and services (voluntary or otherwise) such as selected food and health and safety related items in Member States where market conditions do not currently support effective competition.

For further information about the CCC and its mandate under the RTC, please visit our website at www.caricomcompetitioncommission.com. If you wish to report unfair or anti-competitive sale and pricing practices that may be in your Member State, please feel free to contact us at admin@ccc.sr.

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