



**Ministry of Health,  
Environment &  
Sustainability**  
Cayman Islands Government

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## **BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEARS 202~~5~~2028**

**Statement to Finance Committee**

**By Hon. Katherine Ebank~~W~~ilks, MP**

November 2025

## INTRO

Mister Chair, thank you for the opportunity

This Budget marks a shift in our approach—from reacting to challenges to proactively preparing for them. It emphasizes prevention, partnership, and accountability. We are investing in systems that safeguard health, promote equity, and protect our environment for future generations. In this way, we reaffirm that sustainable growth begins and ends with our people.

Mister Chair, thank you for the opportunity to share the plans of the Ministry of Health, Environment, and Sustainability for the next two years.

Our mission is clear: to create systems that transform care delivery, protect our environment and build a healthier, more resilient Cayman. This vision stands on three pillars: the health of our people, the protection of our natural resources, and the sustainability of our communities. Each pillar supports the others. When our people are healthy, our environment is protected, and our communities strong, Cayman is not only prepared for the future but is poised to shape it.

This Budget reflects a shift in our approach. From *reacting* to challenges .. to proactively preparing for them. It emphasizes prevention, partnership, and accountability. We are investing in systems that safeguard health, promote equity, and protect our environment for future generations. In doing so, we reaffirm that sustainable growth begins **and** ends with our people.

## HEALTH

Mr. Chair, I will start with outlining several key elements of the health aspect of our budget. First, I will begin with the National Health Strategy and Plan. When I assumed this role, I noted the absence of a single coordinated framework for improving population health and strengthening the healthcare system.

The Cayman Islands' previous National Health Policy and Strategic Plan, developed in 2012, expired in 2017. Since then, our healthcare landscape has evolved, and so have the challenges we face, from rising rates of chronic disease to the need for stronger public health infrastructure and more equitable access to care. The National Health Strategy and Plan will unify our efforts to enhance both physical and mental health across all communities. It is more than a policy, it's a comprehensive roadmap for a healthcare system that is inclusive, resilient, and responsive to the needs of every Caymanian. These reforms will also enhance system efficiency and are expected to reduce costs for government over time.

This strategy is:

- **Evidence-based**, using data from the 2023 STEPS National Health Survey.
- **Community-informed**, shaped by voices of our residents.
- Operationally focused, translating our goals into actionable programmes.
- **Financially sustainable**, aligning policy with our budget.
- **Inclusive**, promoting universal health coverage and leaving no one behind.

Among our top priorities is the implementation of the STEPS 2023 National Health Survey findings, which will guide our efforts in preventing chronic illness. A key initiative is the Pan American Health Organization's HEARTS initiative, aimed at reducing deaths from cardiovascular disease which is a leading cause of mortality. This initiative will standardize essential medications, and increase public awareness.

The HEARTS initiative is designed to strengthen primary healthcare systems by improving the diagnosis, treatment, and management of hypertension and related conditions. The goal

is clear: to make HEARTS the standard model of care for cardiovascular risk management across the Cayman Islands.

Mister Chair, the urgency is clear. In our Islands, nearly 1 in 3 adults has elevated blood pressure and many remain undiagnosed. Through the HEARTS programme, we aim to improve treatment and awareness, especially among younger adults and men who are often less aware of their conditions.

We are also enhancing public health by transforming our Public Health Department into an independent entity. This change will empower us to be more agile and accountable allowing for faster decisions-making and better inter-agency coordination.

Since becoming the Minister, I have taken to Cabinet the proposal to separate the Public Health Department from HSA to facilitate a strong and independent National Public Health Department. We have started with a phased approach, which is a Public Health Unit as this does not have any additional financial or civil service implications and will allow us to begin this separation from 1 January 2026.

Having a National Public Health Department will significantly aid in preventative care. By focusing on prevention, we will implement comprehensive health promotion and disease prevention programmes that target risk factors associated with chronic diseases and heart disease. These are major burdens on our healthcare system. By emphasizing community education, screening, and early interventions, we can help residents adopt healthier lifestyles and identify health issues before they escalate. This proactive approach will lead to a healthier population, reducing the demand for more expensive acute medical interventions and, in turn, lowering overall healthcare costs.

The Public Health Department serves as the first line of defence in protecting the health of our population and plays a vital role in:

- Monitoring and controlling communicable diseases, including public health programmes and outbreak response.
- Promoting maternal and child health, ensuring that families receive the support they need from birth through adolescence.
- Conducting health surveillance and research on a national level, which informs national strategies and helps us respond to emerging health threats.
- Educating the public on nutrition, chronic illness prevention, and mental wellness.
- Working with international bodies such as PAHO and WHO, to align with global best practices and access technical expertise.

We are preparing amendments to legislations as part of the transition to the National Public Health Department. The changes will place a clear duty of care on practitioners to report cancer and other specified communicable diseases. This measure strengthens the country's ability to track conditions that affects the health of those who live in Cayman and supports earlier interventions, and improves how resources are directed to the areas of greatest need.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Mister Chair, in conjunction with our public health initiatives, I would now like to turn to a subject that is at the top of my Ministry's list of priorities. Mental health challenges are rising, especially among our young people. The National Drug Council's 2024 Student Survey revealed that one in four students in the Cayman Islands has considered suicide, and one in eight has attempted it. Many spoke openly at the INSPIRE youth event about loneliness, pressure, bullying, and feeling unseen. Their message was honest ~~and~~ **urgent**. These young people need safe spaces, support, and a government that truly cares.

We recognise that building a healthy, sustainable Cayman begins with caring for our people - mind, body, and spirit. My Ministry is responding with a renewed focus on prevention, early

intervention, and stronger community-based mental health support. This is how we turn concern into compassion, and compassion into action.

This budget provides funds for the construction of a new mental health facility designed to serve youth and adolescents, in an effort to enhance patient care, improve operational efficiency and reduce long-term healthcare expenditures.

We also know, Mister Chair, that something needs to be done to address the pressing needs of the youth population now. That's why our budget also reflects the establishment of a four-bed, age and gender segregated inpatient ward designed to provide specialised treatment and care for adolescents experiencing acute mental health challenges – while we focus on building the youth mental health facility.

Additionally, we will introduce a mobile mental health nursing team that will provide rapid response via a mobile clinic that can deliver on-site community interventions and crisis support to children, adolescents and adults. This new mobile mental health nursing team will bring care directly to the community, ensuring that help reaches people where and when they need it most. Access to care should not be a barrier to services, especially in crisis situations, Mister Chair. By introducing this mobile unit our hope is that people in crisis can get the help that they need from qualified professionals in a timely manner. This is preventative mental health care. By having nurses back in the community ensuring that patients receive their medications will prevent what we are currently facing, which is having many patients requiring acute care. This shift will enhance the overall quality of care, allowing the healthcare providers to dedicate more time and resources to complex cases that require immediate, specialised attention.

Mister Chair, as we continue to address the growing mental health needs of our people, it is vital that we strengthen the systems of care that support recovery and reintegration. Treatment does not end at crisis intervention or hospital discharge, it extends into the community, where individuals rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose. The Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre plays a central role in this continuum of care.

Through its Advisory Council, the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre is strengthening clinical oversight and expanding its programmes while maintaining its original mission and orientation. The centre remains committed to its psychosocial rehabilitation model of care, delivering a personalised, recovery-oriented approach that supports residents in developing the skills needed for independent living in a home-like environment. Family and community involvement remain central to the rehabilitation process, and all residents are required to take an active role in programming. I can speak more expansively on the future plans of the facility when we get to the output appropriation.

Mister Chair, we cannot speak about youth mental health without speaking about child safeguarding. I want to thank our partners in education and social development who have led the charge when it comes to this work, but I stand here today to assert that the safeguarding of our children is a priority for Health, and one which will see a much more visible and dedicated effort. It is imperative to have framework in place to ensure our children are safe especially in our health care facilities, and it's something that will be implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development.

My Ministry team will be working on the implementation of policies, programmes, and training initiatives for health care providers designed to protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation within healthcare settings. Our aim is to strengthen inter-agency coordination, promote community awareness, and ensure that child protection standards are effectively upheld across the Cayman Islands in **every** sector. Safeguarding will be incorporated in our work, from the development of standards, to training requirements, vetting and registration. Healthcare professionals are duty bound by the Children (Amendment) Act 2024, to report- yet it has become clear that significant work needs to be undertaken to ensure that this requirement is upheld and all practitioners have policies in place to fulfil this duty.

## MODERNISATION & DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Mister Chair, this government is keen to develop solid foundations upon which both we and future generations can build. The development of national frameworks will provide us with foundations that will help to create and maintain high standards of healthcare while also modernising the way that regulatory work is done.

For too long, the Cayman Islands have operated without the ~~co~~**coordinated** health regulation that our growing community truly needs. It's time we change that. First, we must acknowledge our starting point: decades of fragmented systems, and outdated standards that have left gaps in patient safety and public trust. We owe it to our people to bring order clarity, and accountability to our healthcare system.

I plan to do that by introducing practitioner codes of practice that hold our clinicians to the highest possible standards. To do this, Mister Chair, we need greater investment into the Department of Health Regulatory Services. We will continue to support DHRS' Online Service Platform and Process Improvement Project, which will allow the department to effectively meet the evolving needs of its stakeholders in an efficient and timely manner.

The implementation of a digital service platform, coupled with process improvements, will enhance service delivery, streamline operations, and strengthen regulatory oversight. This initiative will also enable the department to effectively manage growth within the health insurance sector and adapt to ongoing amendments to the Acts and Regulations that govern its mandates and deliverables. I am happy to elaborate more on the new digital service platform in the budget allocation.

My team will also continue to advance the legislative framework that is needed in order to ensure that ours is a modern, responsive and equitable healthcare system. Updates to the Health Practice Act will also serve to create clinical standards of practice within our islands, ensuring quality care for all.



Work on amendments to the health insurance regulatory framework is ongoing, Mister Chair. A significant number of proposed changes aim to streamline and improve various operational aspects, including the processes for approving, renewing and withdrawing of approved insurers. These proposed changes to the Health Insurance Commission will also improve the regulatory processes of employers and employees.

While we recognise the importance of more efficient operations and the need to adopt a more data-driven approach to decision-making, our primary focus remains on addressing concerns about how health insurance is currently being offered and find practical solutions for a more cost-efficient health insurance system.

The Pharmacy Act 2024, which you may remember, Mister Chair, was a landmark reform that replaced the outdated legislation from 1979, introduces clear licensing requirements for importing, manufacturing, wholesaling, and dispensing medicines. It empowers the Pharmacy Council to approve medicines based on international standards and allows for emergency-use authorisations in times of national health crises. It also bans internet and mail-order pharmacies without a physical presence on-island, protecting our population from counterfeit and unsafe drugs. I commend former Minister Turner for getting this Act passed.

Subsequent to the Act, is the Pharmacy Regulations, which are underway, and once the regulations are approved, will allow for the enactment of the Pharmacy Act, and these will also be supported by the DHRS' inspection team that has now been expanded to now include dedicated pharmacy inspectors.

Other efforts to modernise our healthcare system, Mister Chair, will include the implementation of an electronic prescribing system to streamline the prescription process, enhance patient safety, reduce medication errors, and improve coordination between healthcare providers and pharmacies across the Cayman Islands.

## ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Mister Chair, our health and our environment are inextricably linked. Healthy environments with clean air and water, access to green spaces and nutritious, locally grown foods help to support good physical and mental health.

Preservation and protection matter everywhere, but in Cayman, they are particularly vital. Our connection to the land, the sea, and our heritage give us a sense of identity, belonging, and purpose – foundations that are essential for mental health, well-being and a resilient community.

### National Solid Waste Strategy

Moving on, Mister Chair, to a matter that touches every household, every business, and every community in our Islands. That matter is waste management, usually discussed within the context of the George Town Landfill.

For decades, we have known that time and capacity are against us. The 124,125 (One hundred and twenty-four thousand, one hundred and twenty-five) tonnes of waste sent to the landfill last year exceeded previous projections made ten years ago, which estimated a worst-case scenario of 80,000 tonnes per year. We know this has to do with the population growth but this is where we are at.

We have the data and models that demonstrate just how quickly our landfill capacity is diminishing. For example, according to data from the Department of Environmental Health, out of the more than 124,000 tonnes of waste that was deposited in landfill in 2024, 60% (that's 74,675 tonnes) came from commercial waste. 17% (20,978 tonnes) was vegetation waste and 12% (15,250 tonnes) came from household waste.

By contrast, other small island nations in our region are already diverting more than half of their waste away from landfill. Barbados, for example, according to their 2009 National

Report to The United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development, diverts up to [70% of its solid waste away from the landfill](#) through various facilities for processing metals, construction, yard waste and recycling; and Bermuda diverts almost all its municipal waste through their waste-to-energy facility. Mister Chair, we can and must do better.

Mister Chair, we now know, based on the latest models from the Department of Environmental Health, that if we don't implement an interim plan, we have approximately five to seven years before reaching capacity at the George Town Landfill with limited contingency for emergencies.

This government's SPS includes a specific outcome: the development of a sustainable, cost effective waste management strategy and plan. My Ministry team and I, in consultation with subject matter experts, have reviewed what is already in place, including existing project contracts and land agreements. We are able to act **now**, and we do not have to start from scratch. I will say this publicly, this is no ISWMS 2.0.

Mister Chair, as you know we had to end our project agreement with the ~~Dad~~ consortium for the Integrated Solid Waste Management System due to the fact that it was not value for money amongst other nuances that I won't go into. For those who would like to know more, I direct you to the report produced by the Auditor General.

Mister Chair, we could not move forward with any plan that would place generational debt on our children and grandchildren. The approach **must** be financially responsible, technically sound and workable across sectors.

The way forward therefore requires a multi-faced approach that address waste generation, waste diversion and waste treatment. This also requires changes in how we consume and dispose of materials. We all have a collective responsibility to reduce the amount of waste we produce. Government can provide systems and policy direction, but the volume entering the landfill reflects daily decisions in homes, businesses, and commercial operations.

We have, Mister Chair, a proposed ten-year plan, from 2025 to 2035. To start, Mister Chair, our goal during the next five years is to reduce the amount of waste heading to landfill, buying us time to deliver on this proposed National Solid Waste Plan and build a new solid waste facility. We will be prioritising the three largest contributors of waste to landfill: green waste (that is vegetal or plant waste), recyclable material waste and household waste. The objective is to build new processing facilities to adequately and safely manage these major categories of waste.

Mister Chair, our plan is incremental and starts with developing both a Recycling Policy and a Business Case for each of those mentioned facilities at the same time, we will begin the required three stage business case for the new solid waste facility and once completed, we can begin waste management works. Rolling out recycling and diverting from the landfill is part of the overall solution. We have the benefit of beginning works as early as next year due to the phased approach that will be taken.

We must work together – businesses, households, government and non-government organisations – to reduce the amount of waste we generate. The proposal will promote and encourage recycling, and that is an important component – but recycling on its own won't solve everything. That's why I am proposing a joined-up cohesive plan. Prioritising the construction of processing facilities that will have the most impact on waste reduction.

The timeline will be tight. But passing the proposed recycling policy and strategy, which will be developed early next year, and starting the RFP and construction of these three priority facilities will win us time and capacity. Mister Chair, with this new Waste Management Plan, implementing facilities to increase recycling – I believe we can decrease the volume of waste going to landfill and extend the landfill's lifespan.

Mister Chair, the budget allocates \$993,000 of (nine hundred and ninety-three thousand dollars) over two years for OE 152 - Maintenance of the Completed George Town Landfill (GTLF) Remediation Works Phase 1, and \$2,078,000 (two million seventy-eight thousand Cayman Dollar) in HES1 for the provision of comprehensive project management, technical, legal, and financial advisory services to support the implementation and optimisation of the National Solid Waste Management Plan across the Cayman Islands. In addition, Mister Chair, within EI94 we have allocated \$6 million towards our solid waste management plan and programmes.

One such project is to replace the **medical waste incinerator at DEH**. Mister Chair, the medical waste incinerator is the primary system for safely destroying potentially infectious and biohazardous waste in the Cayman Islands, processing between 500,000 and 800,000 pounds annually. The existing unit, is approximately 20 years old and does not meet modern environmental or operational standards. The incinerator requires frequent maintenance and costly major repairs, resulting in prolonged downtime each year during which medical waste must be stored. To ensure the safe and sustainable treatment of medical waste, a new incinerator housed within a dedicated building and equipped with modern emission controls and monitoring systems is essential.

Mister Chair, we have also assessed where we can **upgrade and enhance equipment and fleets** for the Department of Environmental Health's operations. Laboratory upgrades at DEH will enhance testing accuracy, environmental monitoring, and compliance. Modernised waste management improvements will boost landfill efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and ensure long-term sustainability across all islands. Mister Speaker we cannot expect the department to address our waste management challenges with an outdated fleet or inadequate systems.

Mister Chair, the **Cayman Brac Landfill currently operates without a landfill compactor**. This is an essential piece of equipment for effective waste management on the Sister Islands. A compactor compresses incoming waste, maximising the use of available space and extending the landfill's operational lifespan. Proper compaction also minimises air voids within the waste mass, which is the primary method for preventing deep-seated landfill fires. Since the introduction of a Bomag compactor on Grand Cayman, no deep-seated fires have occurred. As the Cayman Brac landfill continues to expand, the likelihood of such fires will increase without proper compaction. Mister Speaker, procuring a landfill compactor for the Brac landfill will significantly reduce this risk, improve site safety, and ensure more efficient landfill operations for the Sister Islands.

Mister Chair, this plan will provide opportunities in our country for jobs in the energy and environment sector, economic diversification, and improve our national resilience.

Colleagues, our country is calling on us to lead — not as separate ministries, not as opposing sides, but as one people with one purpose. The environmental health of our country affects us all, and now we can be part of a real, lasting solution.

Let us work together to build these facilities, to strengthen our communities, and to secure the health of our islands so that the work we begin today endures for those who follow us. This is our chance to turn waste into worth, and commitment into change. The environmental future of our Cayman Islands depends on what we choose to do together — *now*.

I look forward to your full support as we work to make this National Solid Waste Strategy a reality.

## MRCU

Mister Chair, another Key Capital Project for 2026 to 2027 is with MRCU. As we all know, effective mosquito control is incredibly important to our quality of life and is directly related to public health's ability to control diseases that can be spread by mosquitoes, such as dengue fever, Chikungunya [pronounced *chikuhngu nyuh*], Malaria and Yellow fever. The

MRCU, like so many of our departments has done an excellent job with the resources they have, but if we want to keep our country free from epidemic-levels of mosquito-borne viruses then we must invest in new aircraft. The current mosquito control programme relies on a fleet of two aircraft, that have exceeded their optimal service life and the required maintenance is costly. This investment will strengthen our capacity to protect public health and control the presence and increase of mosquitos. Mister Chair, we are planning to invest \$1,800,000 (one million, eight hundred thousand Cayman Dollars) in the procurement of replacement aircrafts which will significantly improve operational safety, coverage efficiency, and responsiveness during peak mosquito seasons.

## CLOSING

Mister Chair, as I close, I want to reaffirm this Government's commitment to delivering thoughtful, evidence-based solutions to our challenges.

Access to quality and affordable healthcare, clean air and water, and the preservation of our beaches and natural environments is not a privilege for the few. It is a right for every Caymanian, and one that we are entrusted to protect. These are essential to building a society where people are healthy, empowered, and able to thrive at every age and stage of life.

To the youth of our islands, we hear you. Your voices matter, and we are taking action to support your future as Maya Angelou reminded us, *"You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time."* This Budget reflects that belief together we are creating a Cayman where everyone has the opportunity and support to thrive.

Thank you