

R32,25 million towards the healthcare needs of the Ugu people

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“The problem of access affects all health service, and not just HIV service. What BroadReach and USAID have done speaks directly to the crux of Primary health Care; people getting what they need where they need it - near their homes” said the MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, at the handover of ten infrastructure development projects at the cost of R32, 25 million in UGU district in the south coast.

The MEC was accompanied by the MEC for Arts and Culture, Sports and Recreations, Mrs. Weziwe Thusi. The Partnership between the department of health, BroadReach and the USAID began as a response to the needs of the people of Ugu who largely live in rural areas. Only 16% of the areas are urban. The district has 3 district, 1 regional and 1 TB hospitals. These hospitals are supported by 54 primary health care (PHC) clinics. In terms of HIV prevalence, the district is one of the three districts with high HIV prevalence in the province (the others being eThekweni and Pietermaritzburg) and one in four in the country.

Also present during the hand over were the US Consul General, Jill Derderian, who said they were thrilled that USAID was able to make such a positive contribution to the lives of the rural people of Ugu; and the Chairman of BroadReach Healthcare, Dr Enerst Darkoh.

“In 2007/8 we had 8290 people on antiretroviral treatment and this number is now at 35 000; which is more than double in just two years. Only 25 000 of the 35 000 are still collecting their treatment meaning that we are losing quite a number due to death. However, we have been able to bring down the mother to child transmission rate from 21% to 5% and we hope with such interventions we will bring it to zero;” said the health District Manager, Mr. Veeran Chetty.

A modeling study was conducted by BroadReach in order to see which areas needed improvements in order to achieve the desired goals. The department of health was concerned with the new number of infections that were spiraling up and the need to provide access to those in need of treatment so that life could be added to the years that HIV people live in suffering. This also required that treatment initiation is brought nearer to the people, at the primary healthcare level and be nurse initiated.

As part of prevention strategies the district scaled up its medical medial circumcision from April and 861 men have undergone the procedure in the district. Since the launch of the HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) campaign, 79 000 people have been counseled and tested. Part of the BroadReach partnership is employing 26 healthcare professionals.

Speaking about the partnership, Dr Mpuma Kamanga of BroadReach said; “Isn’t amazing that while civil society organizations recently marched to urge the developing countries to give money funding towards the Global Fund against Malaria, TB, HIV and AIDS, we in South Africa – KwaZulu-Natal – are here today to celebrate our partnership by handing over these 10 projects to the community? Our aim in this investment is to provide integrated services that are able to assist existing rural primary healthcare in treatment and support to HIV patients. We also want to encourage government’s effort to roll out primary healthcare initiated treatment programmes so as to improve access and the cost thereof as well as promote nurse initiated antiretroviral treatment at primary healthcare level.”

He added and said that the improvements improve infection control and also provide a comfortable working environment for the staff. The facilities are fully air-conditioned and have artwork in the waiting areas and the corridors providing a truly relaxed atmosphere for both patients and staff.

On accepting the projects on behalf of the community, the MEC for Health said; “I have always wondered why Ugu district seems to have the same high prevalence rate as eThekweni and Umgungundlovu when I thought this area has a stable community. Here you do not have industries and very high traffic volumes. It has dawned on me that in dealing with HIV we have to tackle it district by district”.

The MEC further said that the handover takes place at a time when the world will unite to commemorate the Partnership against AIDS which is a day when all sectors unite and reaffirm their commitment to eradicating HIV and AIDS in the face of the world's history. This day is commemorated on the 10th October each year. MEC Thusi added that if KwaZulu-Natal wins the fight against AIDS, the whole country will win. MEC Thusi has been deployed by Cabinet to be its champion in rooting out all social ills and leading the district development programme as well as service delivery by all government departments.