

Media Statement: MEC's open clinics to help prevent high rate of teenage pregnancies and promote reproductive health

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kwaMbonwa – The KwaZulu-Natal government are putting credence to the government's commitment of "Working together we can do more" as MECs; Mrs. Ina Cronje', Lydia Johnson and Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, visit Umziwabantu Municipality to consult the citizens on the provincial budget, rural development and to hand-over two clinics that costs government R14 million.

Speaking ahead of the event the MEC for Health Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo said; "This government is committed to working with the people to weave the threads that will see all of us celebrating a nation which is non racial, non-sexist and democratic - a nation that is dedicated to pushing back the frontiers of poverty."

The Department of Health is officially opening clinics as a means of promoting Primary Health Care which it sees as an 'essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology, made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community through their full participation and at a cost that the community and the country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination.' (Alma Alta Declaration, 1978).

"The aim of primary health care (PHC) is to ensure that all people, rich and poor, are able to access the services necessary for realizing the highest level of health," says MEC Dhlomo.

The areas in which the clinics are being opened have very high rate of Teenage Pregnancy. In the period between 2009 and 2010, 123 school children fell pregnant from the three nearby high schools. The numbers are; at Jolwayo High 83 girls, at KwaMbonwa High 14 girls and at Cekeza High Schools 26 girls fell pregnant while in school.

KwaZulu-Natal is faced with a high burden of disease which is compounded by; high prevalence of TB, HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), high maternal and child mortality and morbidity, high incidence of non-communicable diseases as well as the high trauma and violence cases. Women continue to be the face of HIV. The estimated HIV prevalence rate for the province is around 38, 7% (and about 10% of girls aged 10 – 24 are HIV positive) with a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) incidence rate of 6%. The province also has unacceptably high (30% of child rape statistics) child rape cases.

MEC Dhlomo says; "The HIV statistics are already pointing to a worrying trend for the greater UMUZIWABANTU Municipality. The problem requires that parents and elders in this community take a stand and sing from the same 'hymn book' as government on the dangers of early sexual debut and teenage pregnancy, in particular. We all need to create a social compact against this epidemic and turn despair into hope for a better future for these young girls. According to HIV Counseling and Testing stats of April 2010 – February 2011 out of 28 881 that came forward for testing, 4662 (16%) tested positive."

With regards to sexual and reproductive health, the President indicated during the State of the National Address, and said; 'Given our emphasis on women's health, we will broaden the scope of reproductive health rights and provide services related to amongst others, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy and sanitary towels for the indigent.'

The department believes that this type of emphasis can be best achieved when the department is able to connect people with their clinics as the sexual and reproductive health services are seen as . . . the collection of methods, techniques and services that contribute to reproductive health and well-being by preventing and solving reproductive health problems. It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations, and not merely counseling and

care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases. (International Conferences on Population and Development in 1999)

The department hopes that by promoting the use of clinics it will help in the attainment of a better health for all. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified five key elements to achieving that goal as: (i) reducing exclusion and social disparities in health; (ii) organizing health services around people's needs and expectations; (iii) integrating health into all sectors; (iv) pursuing collaborative models of policy dialogue; and (v) increasing stakeholder participation.

“As government we are committed to delivering healthcare that is community oriented, i.e. centered around people's needs and expectations, so as to make them more relevant and more responsive to the changing world, while producing better outcomes. I am glad that my colleagues MEC Cronje and Johnson have joined me as we ensure that we give effect to the government's commitment of building a social compact for better health outcomes.” says MEC Dhlomo.

Better sexual & reproductive health outcomes for the youth to be achieved; it will require a collective effort of individuals, families, organizations, and institutions; our communities, rather than any single programme. Communities need to express a will to support and start local prevention programmes rather than programmes that focus on remediation or treatment. In addition, in the long run prevention programmes save resources because they stop conditions from growing into larger problems that cost the community more in terms of lost human potential. Prevention must not be a “stop-gap” strategy, but must seek to address the long-term health and well-being of the community.

Following the tabling by the Minister of Finance of the National Budget; the MEC for Finance is thereafter required to table a Provincial Budget to the Provincial Legislature. The public consultation by MECs Cronje and Dhlomo aims to stimulate public debate on economic and social policy; promote economic policies and programmes that fight unemployment and poverty; identify ways to finance additional public spending and investment; and create new opportunities for popular participation in the budget process.

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