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KZN Health MEC outlines the strides made in the province to curb the spread of HIV/Aids at International Aids Congress, Australia

KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has presented the province's successful strategy to curb the spread of HIV/Aids, leaving scores of delegates at the 20th International Aids Congress 2014 in Melbourne, Australia, highly impressed.

Dhlomo's presentation, titled "Towards Ending Aids", and which was attended by mayors, senior city officials and UNAIDS representatives, highlighted a number of successes borne by KZN health initiatives such as HIV Testing and Counselling; Medical Male Circumcision and the Anti-retroviral Treatment (ART) programme that has made KwaZulu Natal the biggest site in the world.

He outlined the province's key successes against the epidemic, which include increasing Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) sites from 89 in 2008 to 632 in 2013 and increasing the number of patients on ARTs from 225,389 in 2008 to 841 291 in 2013.

Dr Dhlomo told the delegates that KwaZulu-Natal has also embarked on an aggressive Medical Male Circumcision (MMC) drive, which has seen 412 565 boys and men circumcised throughout the province, with the City of Durban accounting for 109 267 of those circumcisions.

The Department had worked extensively with Traditional leadership houses and had contracted Traditional MMC coordinators to assist with recruiting on people to undergo Medical Male Circumcision (MMC), Dhlomo said. All facilities are now providing MMC services, and two hospitals situated in areas regarded as high volume sites were undertaking a circumcising a minimum of 35 clients per day.

The presentation also covered initiatives like the switching of all stable Regimen 1 patients to a Fixed Dose Combination, the Nurse-Initiated Management of ARVs, the provision of Post Exposure Prophylaxis to rape victims even before cases are reported to the police as well as the establishment of HIV and TB testing in non-medical sites.

Delegates were also told of the results of a dramatic shift in the screening and management of non-communicable diseases, which saw the KZN Department of Health take to the streets and establish mobile clinics at high activity areas like taxi ranks and truck stops where vital health services were offered.

Dr Dhlomo also emphasized the impact of initiatives such as "First Things First" and "Graduate Alive" initiatives which are aimed at youth in universities, colleges, finishing schools; as well as hot spots for key populations and people most at risk of infection, such as Sex workers, Men who have sex with Men, Transgender and People who inject drugs and truckers.

In 2013, the Department distributed 134, 6 million male condoms and 3,2 million female condoms. It established secondary condom distribution sites in the communities e.g. taverns, night clubs, community halls, recreational centres; and partnered with the business sector – inter alia South African breweries, Ports Authority, Airports company – in the distribution of condoms.

The 20th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2014) is the premier gathering for those working in the

field of HIV, including scientists, medical practitioners, activists, policymakers, people living with HIV and others committed to ending the epidemic. It is a tremendous opportunity for researchers from around the world to share the latest scientific advances in the field, learn from one another's expertise, and develop strategies for advancing all facets of collective efforts to treat and prevent HIV. This 2014 Congress, which is being held from 20–25 July 2014 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, has convened over 12,000 participants from nearly 200 countries, including over 800 journalists.

Dr Dhlomo told delegates that strong political will, leadership and a multi-sectorial approach had created an enabling environment. Dr Dhlomo's presentation elicited a spirited round of applause from the delegates. The conference, which will be held in Durban in 2016, draws to a close on Friday. Ends.

Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health.

