

MEDIA RELEASE
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KZN Health MEC vows to learn sign language, announces the Department's plans to also train doctors and nurses

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, believes that no disabled person should have to compromise doctor-patient confidentiality by involving a third party to communicate their health needs with medical professionals.

To this end, the MEC has vowed to enroll himself in a sign language course within the next two weeks. He has also announced the Department's bold plans to train nurses, doctors and therapists in sign language.

Speaking at the opening of a three-day Health Disability and Rehabilitation Summit at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital today, Dr Dhlomo said the Department already has 20 front line workers in trained in basic sign language in five (05) districts.

"PROs; Admitting Clerks; Porters; Pharmacy Assistants and Porters have also been targeted in this training. This is just the first phase of the training; we are still going to train our doctors; nurses; therapists and others, within the next 2 years.

"We will thus soon be putting out a sign declaring our institutions as Sign Language User Friendly," Dr Dhlomo said. Dr Dhlomo said the Government's vision of "A Long and Healthy Life for All" includes Persons with Disabilities.

"The reality of the matter is that Persons with Disabilities have the same health needs as people without any disability.

In this country, the mainstreaming of disability remains a huge challenge and disabled people are often marginalized even at issues pertaining to employment as well as in the provision of health services."

According to a Statistics South Africa Report based on Census 2011 data, the national disability prevalence rate is 7.5% in South Africa.

KwaZulu-Natal which is the province with a second largest population of in the country and has a disability prevalence of 8.4%.

Dr Dhlomo also observed that in the past, specialized services such as rehabilitation programmes were available mostly in urban areas. This meant that disabled people had to spend a night in hospital benches before being transported to a hospital in urban areas to receive rehabilitation services.

The same torturous exercise would play itself out when they will have to sit and wait for the rest of the people before being transported back to a rural hospital for another on the hospital benches.

The situation is changing for the better in the rural areas of KZN especially with the deployment of Community Service for Therapists, as indicated by Dhlomo who tabulated what the province is doing in this regard:

- Currently have 153 permanently employed therapists as well as 171 Community services therapists spread across facilities doing community outreach programmes as well.
- Within budget limitations providing Assistive Devices
- Having teams in place responsible for identifying and assessing people with disabilities and also instrumental in finding suitable assistive devices.
- Established the Medical Orthotics & Prosthetics Training Project in partnership with the Durban University of Technology to train students to do measurements for assistive devices and to manufacture these devices.
- Under the leadership of Hon Premier, Senzo Mchunu, recently commissioned McCord Hospital as an Eye Care Centre of Excellence in the Province.

Dr Dhlomo also indicated that due to an increase in complications of diseases, there is a demand for disability services. This adds to the burden of disease in the province due to disability caused by Motor Vehicle Accidents; complications of HIV/AIDS drugs (ARVs); TB drugs; astonishing rise in cases of Non Communicable Diseases as well as people generally getting old.

He then extolled the participants at the Summit which included health care professionals and organisations representing people with disabilities to work together, reminding them that the issue is not just about impairments finding ways to address the contexts in which barriers limit participation for disabled people.



KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo and HOD Dr Sifiso Mtshali with the sign language poster that will be displayed at the entrances of hospitals across the province.

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