

Clergy is key to ensuring a healthier society, says KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo

28 September 2017

KZN HEALTH MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has urged the clergy to use its significant influence over society to spread health-related messages to congregants, in order to help save and prolong lives. The MEC was addressing scores of religious and spiritual leaders in Durban today during the launch of the Department's faith-based forum. MEC Dhlomo said that Government holds a view that, long-term health outcomes of the citizens of KwaZulu - Natal, are shaped by factors largely outside the health system. This include lifestyle such as sexual behaviour and lack of exercise; diet and nutritional levels; education, road accidents and the level of violence. Therefore, education has a critical role to play in helping the province to achieve its wellness and healthy lifestyle targets.

MEC Dhlomo urged religious leaders to become:

- Proponents of messages regarding how to prevent or detect diseases early, and encourage the seeking of treatment for ailments such as HIV and TB; diabetes; hypertension; high blood pressure and many others,
- Advocates for safe sexual practices, and preach the word about the benefits of leading healthy lifestyles, including adhering to good nutrition and regular exercise,
- Encourage pregnant congregants to present at healthcare institutions for ante-natal clinics so that any possible health challenges can be detected early and managed appropriately,
- Active messengers in the condemnation of social ills such as teenage pregnancy, intergenerational and transactional sex, including the sugar daddy/blesser/Ben 10 phenomena,
- Active participants in the provision of Palliative Care to offer spiritual nourishment to people who are terminally ill, and to help minimise their pain.



The MEC with Reverend Sgungu Shangase



The MEC with the Department's TB ambassador, prince Nhlanguiso Zulu

"We believe that as the clergy, you are such an important and influential team of South Africans. You are respected leaders. You administer the word of the Lord over a large number of people. I urge you to show the way. We will find ways to hold workshops and give you health education, so that you can be able to transmit these messages effectively," said the MEC

He said that the clergy can help South Africa to emulate countries such as Cuba, Brazil and China, whose citizens have a long life expectancy. Such countries are able to preserve their precious history, culture and traditions – while saving their government’s money as they don’t have to spend limited resources on treatment and healthcare costs.

“How they get there is because they exercise, and eat well. Here in South Africa people start getting sick, which means that Government starts spending money on medication too early. We are not saying run from Durban to PMB, but find a way to move your body. People shouldn’t be taking a lift from the ground floor to the first floor. When people get home, they sit on the sofa, and are too lazy to even pick up the remote control. Those are ingredients for trouble.”



The ministers that attended the meeting

MEC’s message was well received by the religious leaders, who conveyed words of gratitude to the Department for reaching out to them. They also raised ideas on how to move forward and strengthen relations with the Department. Some of the ideas that will soon be explored include the following:

- Holding a day of prayer for healthcare workers to encourage better patient reception and care in facilities;
- Improving access to hospitals for religious leaders to enable them to pray for sick patients to give them spiritual hope;
- Ongoing training for religious leaders to ensure that their messages are aligned with the key messages of the Department.