

Speech by MEC Neliswa Peggy Nkonyeni on the launch of the  
Westmead Trucking Wellness Centre

08 October 08

Programme Director Cllr Nomvuzo Shabalala

His Worship, EThekweni Mayor, Baba Obed Mlaba

His Excellency, Ambassador, Royal Netherlands Embassy

Deputy City Manager: Governance and Acting Head of Health Mr  
Sipho Cele

Esteemed Representatives from:

- National Bargaining Council –Road Freight Industry
- Engen Petroleum
- Swedish International Development Corporation Agency (SIDA)
- Centre for Municipality Research and Advice
- Abashayeli esihlangene ngabo
- Honoured guest

Good evening

How refreshing it is to be in the company of friends; people who share a common objective and strive for an AIDS free nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, what we are about this evening is an international phenomenon. We are glad that our country has embraced and leading in our continent in establishing and supporting this concept that is aimed at preserving and prolong life. Through progressive stances like this, it is not only the human resource that is being preserved but also the investment of those

shouldering the economy that must take care of us and lay the foundation for the needs of generations to come.

The opening of this 6<sup>th</sup> Trucking Wellness Centre is a mile stone indeed for our Province and augurs well for our quest to reduce the spread of HIV and AIDS virus in the road freight industry, and to provide assistance to truckers who are already infected.

We take this opportunity to congratulate the eThekweni Municipality; the Centre for Municipality Research and Advice, the Royal Netherlands Embassy; Engen Petroleum; SIDA; the National Bargaining Council from Road Freight Industry as well as all the stakeholders who have made this dream a reality. I am also deeply humbled by the good gesture coming from the Royal Netherlands Embassy indicating that they are even keener to establish another Truck Wellness Centre in this beautiful city which is a hub for our continent. I fully agree with the choice of the envisaged site, yes indeed, Clairwood does need a Wellness Centre of its own.

We all need to combine our efforts in targeting all existing and emerging high transmission areas and make a concerted effort to ensure that the frequenters do access health care.

The KwaZulu Natal Department of Health is fully committed to supporting all avenues aimed at curbing the rampant spread of HIV and AIDS as out of all things, we do not find glory in being called an epicentre of AIDS. Our willingness to get involved in this

regard is demonstrated by the active we are giving to the existing Wellness Centres based in the following areas:

- **Ladysmith Toll Plaza** in Uthukela District
- **Mooi River Wellness Centre** in Umgungundlovu District
- **Marburg Wellness Centre** in Ugu District
- **Kokstad Wellness Centre** in Sisonke District
- **Pongola Wellness Centre** in Zululand District

As stakeholders concerned with the well being of all South Africans, we have to acknowledge that truck drivers are away from their families for long periods of time and that there are high numbers of sex workers both along the road as well as at truck stops.

We also have to admit that in many areas that truck drivers travel through, there exist untold stories of misery, bare poverty and high rates of unemployment; features that make it easy for women to sleep around with those from who they can get goods and cash to survive.

In almost all cases, Durban, as the busiest port in Africa, is the point of departure and a destiny for most of the Trucks that we find on the roads and it thus becomes imperative that we have this Wellness Centre here. Through Information Technology, we are also very pleased that we are able link with other Wellness Centres around the country, this is very necessary in terms monitoring the severity of the drivers condition and also knowing

what medication has been administered, say at Beit Bridge or Ventersburg Wellness Centre.

We thus ask all the Drivers who are our brothers; fathers; uncles and sons who drive the wheels of our country's economy, who we know that they are strong, handsome and lonely on long lonely stretches of roads to make use of this facility that will operate from 6pm to 12 midnight everyday. As a Department we commit to provide health promotive, preventative and curative services to them. We guarantee that here they will freely get the following:

- Voluntary counseling and testing;
- STI diagnosis, treatment and counseling;
- Treatment for minor ailments;
- Information and education on reproductive health,
- Condom demonstration and distribution; and
- General HIV/AIDS counseling and support group sessions.

Because of the locality of this clinic we decry the fact that ordinary members of the community cannot access it like we do accept them on a smaller scale in Mooi River but we do hope that diesel attendants, tyre fitters, as well as staff who maintain the trucks will make use of the services offered.

We must make it clear that our policy here is to refer all patients who test HIV positive to the Doctor and that we do not disperse and offer ARV's as they require close monitoring.

I think it would be wise if we utilize this opportunity to advise each other that even if you are infected with HIV you can still lead a normal healthy life for many years by:

- taking care of your health
- being positive about life
- getting support from those around you, and
- practicing safer sex

We also have to warn the general public and our Truck drivers against the following ,

- *Regular tobacco use.*
- *Hypertension or high blood pressure.*
- *Being overweight and experiencing obesity.*
- *Poor eating and drinking habits, inadequate diet and nutrition.*
- *Lack of physical activity and proper exercise, degrading states of physical fitness.*
- *Abuse of alcohol and other chemical substances including misuse of drugs like the sleeping pills.*

From all of us in the Department of Health we are saying thank you to all our stakeholders for taking an active role in the fight against the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Let us continue fighting disease, fighting poverty and giving hope.