

STATEMENT BY THE MEC FOR HEALTH, MS NELISWA PEGGY NKONYENI, AT THE OCCASION OF THE SEND OFF OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL AND RESCUE SERVICES DURING EASTER
09 April 09

More often than not, road safety continues to be treated only as a transportation issue, not as a public health issue. Indeed, road traffic injuries are called accidents. The Department of Health's view of the magnitude and impact of road Accidents has provided an opportunity to address road safety as a critical and rapidly growing public health problem.

What is most overlooked regarding road traffic injuries is the burden it puts on our already overstretched health resources to look after road accident victims in health facilities. Since many of the intervention against road traffic injuries, like wearing seatbelts, not consuming alcohol before driving, ensuring that our vehicles are in good shape etc, are not within our control, we need to look into ourselves for solutions to the carnage of our roads.

During the December holidays, the department recorded the following number of trauma cases; 1056 stabbings, 180

suicides, 205 gunshot, 437 rapes (27% were children), 3131 assaults, 1840 motor vehicle accidents, 17 drowning and 131 burns cases in Durban and Pietermaritzburg hospitals.

Building grassroots capacity is one of the main challenges facing the prevention area today. Injuries and violence, in general, are a substantial burden to public health, accounting for roughly the same number of deaths each year as HIV, TB, and malaria combined. Despite this, in many situations injuries and their prevention have been largely neglected or completely overlooked.

In recent years injuries and violence have gained increasing global recognition as important health and development issues; this recognition has been accompanied by the adoption of important policy documents at the international, regional and country levels, including World Health Assembly resolutions on violence, road traffic injury, and emergency care services.

Thus, at the present time there is a combination of increased awareness, recognition and political commitment on the one hand, and sound technical guidance on the other.

Preventing injuries and violence requires multi-sectoral collaboration, and individuals in health as well as non-health sectors need to understand how injuries and violence occur and how they might be prevented. Institutional support needs to be provided in the form of political, financial, and

infrastructural investments in data collection, information sharing, and viable career paths, among others.

The Department of Health has been tasked to co-ordinate activities on the prevention of injuries and non natural deaths because these categories are currently acknowledged as health and developmental issues.

The strategic goal must be to treat injuries and minimize harm and suffering in both the short and long term; reduce the likelihood of secondary victimization – both intentional and unintentional – by service providers; facilitate redress through the criminal justice system, civil claims courts and other victim compensation mechanisms where possible; reduce the likelihood that individuals will suffer repeat injury in the future or, in relation to violence, that victims themselves will become perpetrators.

During this Easter season we are deploying:

- two brand new emergency helicopters,
- 55 emergency service vehicles and
- 132 newly qualified personnel that will be deployed at strategic points to attend to all emergencies including road accidents, drowning, and other trauma cases to save lives.

We want the people of KwaZulu–Natal to join us in declaring that; *“Injuries and deaths are **NO** accident!”* Let us all work together towards an injury and death free holiday season.

Our Toll-Free (from a Telkom line) Emergency number is 10177. People who have difficulties, can call our **Call Centre** at 0800 005133.

Our key areas of focus are;

- road traffic accidents,
- sexual abuse,
- Children's deaths as a result of drowning, falling and consuming poisonous liquids.

Our message is clear; "***Love and Protect them!***" In this regard we say;

- *Traffic crashes are the number one cause of death for children and youth – Love and Protect them!*
- *1 in 5 women and 1 in 10 men report having been sexually abused as children – Love and Protect them!*
- *The other victims of unnatural injury and death are families and relatives – Love and Protect them!*
- *Children die every year as a result of poisoning, falling and drowning – Love and Protect them!*
- *Alcohol abuse is dangerous to your health;*

Working together we can do more to save lives!

We wish you Happy Easter!