



# World TB Day

South Africa's ongoing efforts to respond to Tuberculosis (TB) have been strengthened with funding of \$94 million for the next five years.

"Just over R4 billion was budgeted in the 2024/2025 [financial year], meeting the projected needs for implementing the National Strategic Plan (NSP). Seventy-one per cent of the TB budget is from domestic sources, 21 per cent from Global Fund and eight per cent from United States government commitments," minister Phaahla said on Sunday in Evaton.

The minister was addressing South Africa's commemorations for World TB Day, which was observed under the theme: "**Yes! You and I Can End TB**".

"We applaud the announcement by the national Department of Health and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) of the award of the Accelerate Tuberculosis Elimination and

Program Resilience Activity (referred to as ACCELERATE) in the amount of \$94 million for the next five years.

"As government, we welcome the generous support from Global Fund and the United States government and appreciate their continued support towards HIV, TB and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) response," Phaahla said. In addition, the TB Programme of the department has developed a comprehensive TB Recovery Plan dashboard, which is used by provinces and districts to monitor the progress of the TB Programme.

The department has also developed an HIV and TB dashboard in the Health Information Centre.

"The South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) Situation Room is a state-of-the-art data consolidation and visualisation hub built at the SANAC offices in Pretoria

but can be accessed virtually from anywhere in the world.

"There is an enormous quantity of data that is generated in many parts and entities of South Africa. It exists in silos and that fragmentation is due to the lack of a central data repository and management point.

"This has made monitoring and evaluation of the country's efforts against HIV, TB and STIs rather difficult. These new data visualisation dashboards have been set up precisely to address that challenge," the minister said.

### Progress in fight against TB

Although South Africa remains among the TB high burden countries, there has been notable progress in the country's fight against the disease.

"A steady decline has been noted in the

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# World TB Day continued



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number of people diagnosed with TB each year since 2007 where the figure was 644 000 compared to 280 000 in 2022. TB-related deaths are falling, but at a much slower rate,” the minister said.

At last year’s commemoration South Africa launched the NSP for HIV, TB and STIs for the period 2023 to 2028 with ambitious targets for TB and the other two epidemics.

“The department has further developed a TB Strategic Plan, which lifts out very pertinent actions that must be taken to address the TB specific challenges as we go towards the end date. This TB Strategic Plan is fully aligned with our NSP for HIV, TB and STIs and will inform the content of the annual TB Recovery Plans for the period 2023 to 2027.

“The successful implementation of the NSP relies on several critical enablers such as the proper implementation of the National TB Recovery Plan, which is one

of the tools we have to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19 on the national TB programme.

“We must scale up the implementation, use, and rapid uptake of new tools and innovations – these include GeneXpert, shorter and oral regimens for drug-resistant TB, as well as routine testing of TB contacts and at-risk populations,” the minister said.

He said the collective counter-response to TB must focus on strengthening early case detection through targeted testing initiatives, particularly among vulnerable populations like men.

“There has been demonstrable will and desire by this government to use all innovations and technology to confront this challenge. As we all know, South Africa has been and remains the world leader in the introduction of new tools to test TB and to treat TB.

“The introduction of the new World Health Organization (WHO) approved Rapid Diagnostic tests for TB has been done

as early as 2010. To date we are looking forward to targeted new generation sequencing.

“The introduction of new and repurposed TB drugs has helped significantly improve the proportion of cured drug resistant (DR-TB) patients. We have rolled out shorter regimens with better drugs for the treatment of drug resistant TB, with the notable launch of the bedaquiline-pretomanid-linezolid-levofloxacin (BPAL-L) programme in September 2023, that has almost 2 000 patients on a six-month DR-TB regimen,” the minister said. South Africa has been part of a vaccine development programme, which is conducted by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK).

“This gives us hope that indeed, we will end TB, by working with all role players, opinion makers, scientists, academics, politicians, and general population,” the minister said.

– SAnews.gov.za

# TB Symposium on new technological developments

The Chief Director for TB Control and Management, Prof. Norbert Ndjeka says it remains a challenge to get patients to continue taking their daily tuberculosis (TB) medication.

Prof. Ndjeka was speaking at a symposium in Sandton, Johannesburg on Saturday, ahead of World TB Day on Sunday.

Prof. Ndjeka elaborated, "One of the challenges we have is that a lot of our people who start treatment do not finish treatment. So there is a high loss to follow up that probably contributes to this. But we know that half of our people who have TB also live with HIV so the burden is

really big."

TB remains a global health challenge and resulted in an estimated 1.3 million deaths since 2002.

South Africa is a global hotspot, being one of the 30 highest TB burden countries. The country has also been and remains a world leader in the introduction of new tools to test and treat TB.

Prof. Ndjeka said: "We have rolled out shorter regimens of treatment with better drugs for drug-resistant tuberculosis, otherwise known as DR-TB, with the notable launch of the BPAL-L programme in September 2023, that has almost 2 000

patients on a six-month DR-TB regimen." A 21-year-old TB survivor, Sinalo Tunywashe said the support of healthcare workers made it easier for him to take his medication on a daily basis.

Tunywashe encouraged patients to take their medication on time.

"So six months is not a lot compared to what I would have taken before the drug that was introduced in September because it was gonna be nine months since I was diagnosed with multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB, so it was actually a benefit for me. Don't think about it a lot, take the pills each and everyday."



# OHS Workshop



The Chief Directorate: Occupational Health this week Monday and Tuesday hosted an Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Workshop for OHS workers in the public health sector of South Africa at the Southern Sun OR Tambo in Gauteng. Speakers on the programme included Director-General Buthelezi; representatives from international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labour Organization (ILO); labour organisations; National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH); South African Local Government Association (SALGA); South African Military Health Service (SAMHS); the Department of Employment and Labour; and provincial heads of wellness and occupational health and safety. According to recent estimates released by the ILO, each year 2,78 million workers die from occupational accidents and

work-related diseases and an additional 374 million workers suffer from non-fatal occupational accidents. It is estimated that lost workdays globally represent almost four per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), and in some countries, this rises to six per cent or more. Aside from the economic cost, there is an intangible cost, not fully recognised in these figures, of the immeasurable human suffering caused by occupational accidents and work-related diseases - tuberculosis (TB) being one. During his opening remarks the director-general announced his intention to recommend that the executive committee include 28 April every year on the departmental Health Awareness Calendar as World Day for Safety and Health at Work. "We, too, shall celebrate the World Day

for Safety and Health at Work to promote the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases nationally. It will be part of our awareness-raising campaign intended to focus international attention on the magnitude of the problem and on how promoting and creating a safety and health culture can help reduce the number of work-related deaths and injuries," said the DG.

He further highlighted the key benefits of prioritising OHS:

- reduced risk by identifying and mitigating hazards
- improved efficiency and productivity due to fewer employees missing work
- improved employee relations and morale
- reduced costs associated with accidents and injuries
- lower insurance premiums resulting from fewer workplace incidents

# Minister meets Limpopo doctors over NHI

Minister Phaahla on Monday met with members of the South African Medical Association (SAMA) to discuss and respond to some of the concerns raised by medical doctors with regards to the National Health Insurance (NHI).

The meeting took place at the Polokwane Mediclinic in Limpopo and formed part of ongoing stakeholder engagements

in the health sector to discuss how all stakeholders should work with government to strengthen the health system to improve healthcare services.

The minister was received and welcomed by the chairperson of SAMA in Limpopo, Dr Choeu, Dr Ledwaba and other leaders in the medical fraternity in Limpopo.

Together with the deputy director-general

responsible for NHI, Dr Nicholas Crisp and other senior officials the minister took time to outline the background of universal health coverage (UHC) globally and NHI domestically as a government policy to correct the unsustainable two-tier health system which currently treat people based on their ability to afford healthcare.

