

**REMARKS BY THE GAUTENG MEC FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS Ms
NOMANTU NKOMO-RALEHOKO ON BEHALF OF PREMIER PANYAZA LESUFI
DURING THE NATIONAL COMMEMORATION OF THE WORLD STOP TB DAY
HELD AT WILBERFORCE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, EMFULENI SUB DISTRICT
IN SEDIBENG ON THE 24 MARCH 2024**

Programme Director,
Deputy President of the Republic of SA and Chair of South Africa National AIDS
Council, Paul Mashatile,
Minister of Health Dr Joe Phaahla,
South African National AIDS Council Chairperson,
Civil Society formations,
Various communities represented,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, we come together to commemorate World TB Day, a day of global significance in our ongoing battle against tuberculosis. This year's observance holds particular importance as it aligns with the conclusion of a crucial phase in our democratic journey, the end of the 6th Administration. As we take this moment to reflect on our progress and achievements, we are reminded of the challenges we have faced and the work that still lies ahead.

I am pleased to share that we are concluding this term on a positive note, especially regarding the key priorities we identified as critical service delivery challenges. These priorities were directly shaped by the public's mandates, and it is gratifying to see the progress we have made in addressing them. Through our collective efforts, we have made significant strides in the fight against TB, but there is more work to be done.

This year's theme, "Yes! You and I Can End TB," resonates deeply with the global effort to eradicate tuberculosis. It highlights the pivotal role individuals play in this endeavor, emphasizing personal responsibility and collective action in combating the disease. The theme serves as a reminder that each of us has a role to play in ending TB. Whether through practicing good hygiene, seeking early diagnosis and treatment, or supporting policies and programs that promote TB prevention and care, every action is crucial. By taking ownership of our health and making informed choices, we contribute significantly to the larger goal of eliminating TB.

Here in Gauteng, we have initiated the AsibeHealthyGP campaign to further promote health education, awareness, and regular health screening. This campaign acknowledges that a healthy and productive province can only be realized when individuals and communities are healthy. Through AsibeHealthyGP, we are striving to make health services more accessible and encouraging everyone to prioritize their health.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Gauteng Department of Health, we are deeply concerned by the 11.3% increase in TB incidence from 2022 to 2023, rising to 33,559 cases. Within this, the 2023 treatment cohort saw 32,559 Drug Susceptible TB patients and 1,041 Drug-Resistant TB patients. While 92.7% of Drug Susceptible TB patients were initiated on treatment, 2,366 patients were not, posing a risk of further transmission due to reasons like being untraceable or relocating.

To combat these challenges, we are implementing strategies such as verifying contact details, sending lab results via SMS, and assigning community health care workers for home support. These efforts aim to improve treatment literacy, support, and tracking until completion. Additionally, there has been an 11.9% increase in Drug-Resistant TB, from 930 to 1,041 cases. This surge underscores the urgent need for action at all levels of society to prevent the reversal of decades of progress in TB control.

Metropolitan areas, particularly Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni, bear the highest burden of TB. Specific areas like Soweto, Hillbrow, Tembisa, and Thokoza are hotspots for TB, driven by factors such as overcrowding, low socio-economic status, undernutrition, and HIV co-infection. Hospitals report the highest TB cases, largely due to late and severe presentations. We urge individuals to seek care at public health facilities at the earliest sign of illness.

Provincial TB outcomes for the 2022 (January – September Cohort) show that 17,246 patients (84.5%) were successfully treated, 1,411 (6.9%) were lost to follow-up, and 1,687 (8.3%) died. Sedibeng reported on 2,648 patients assessed, with 1,641 (61.9%) being PLHIVs, and an average treatment success rate of 75.8% for the district.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The reason we came to Sedibeng is because of the high numbers of TB deaths and loss to follow-up reported in the Emfuleni sub-district. This serves as a stark reminder of the importance of TB treatment, emphasizing that tuberculosis is a curable disease when treated consistently for at least 6 months. Despite challenges such as patients disengaging from treatment, we have intensified our outreach programs to improve TB outcomes.

These efforts include early diagnosis, intensive health education, implementing TB screening at all health facilities, and addressing the drivers of the TB epidemic in hotspot areas. We have also introduced the BPAL Drug Resistance TB treatment and decentralized treatment sites to improve access and reduce hospital

admissions. Our commitment is evident in our high coverage of the BPAL-L Drug Resistance TB treatment, second only to the Northern Cape.

As Gauteng province, it is crucial for our communities, especially those in contact with TB patients, to undergo screening for early detection. While TB is curable, early detection is vital to prevent its spread. I urge our communities to visit their nearest facilities and mobile clinics for TB screening as soon as they experience symptoms, to prevent complications and fatalities.

TB tests conducted by the National Health Laboratory Services (NHLS) in January 2024, show a higher volume of females testing than males. However, the TB positivity rate among males is at 6.8%, double that of females at 2.9%. It is concerning that more women are presenting for TB screening compared to men. We have also men-friendly clinics, and I encourage more males to visit our facilities for comprehensive healthcare screening.

To reduce TB-related deaths and ensure successful treatment, Gauteng Province partners with civil society organizations, mines, traditional healers, business corporates, and government departments to raise awareness and educate communities about TB.

I am delighted to share that the Gauteng Department of Health, in partnership with SANAC, civil society, and our dedicated partners, has been actively engaged in a series of impactful activities across our province in the lead-up to World TB Day on March 24th, 2024.

These initiatives have encompassed a wide range of endeavours, including enlightening Treatment Literacy Sessions with all local PLHIV Sector Members, extensive Community Outreach programs conducted through door-to-door visits aimed at providing essential health education, and extending invitations to communities to participate in the World TB Day main event at Wilberforce Community College.

Moreover, our efforts have included diligent monitoring of the HIV/TB Response at health facilities, coupled with the provision of vital health education to patients in waiting rooms. We have also facilitated meaningful dialogues with traditional health practitioners, engaged in productive conversations with men, and activated faith-based communities to bolster our TB awareness and prevention efforts.

These concerted endeavours have yielded significant outcomes, with a total of 23,668 individuals reached and educated on crucial health matters. Additionally, we have distributed 18,175 Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials and conducted TB screenings for 360 individuals. Furthermore, we have successfully

trained 150 Traditional Health Practitioners across the West Rand, Sedibeng, and Johannesburg, enhancing their knowledge and capacity to combat TB effectively.

So, in all that we are doing as the Gauteng Department of Health, we remain committed to our mission of eradicating TB and ensuring the health and well-being of all our citizens. As we continue our steadfast commitment to TB prevention and treatment, it is my privilege to extend a heartfelt invitation to the Minister of Health, Dr. Joe Phahla, to join us at this podium. Dr. Phahla's leadership and insights are invaluable as we strive to achieve our shared goal of eradicating TB. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Phahla.

Thank you.