

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS, Ms NOMANTU NKOMO-RALEHOKO DURING THE SOPA DABETE HELD AT THE GAUTENG PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE ON THE 22 FEBRUARY 2024

Madame Speaker Ntombi Mekgwe;

Deputy Speaker Vuyo Mhlakaza-Manamela;

Chief Whip of the Governing Party Lesego Makhubela;

Members of the Executive Council;

Members of the Provincial Legislature

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen and

The residents of Gauteng:

Madam Speaker, it is an honour to introduce our special guest today. At just twenty-four years old, Dr. Thakgalo Thibela has already made a significant impact in the medical field. She made history as the youngest female Medical Doctor in South Africa, achieving her Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from Wits University in 2020 at the remarkable age of 21.

Dr. Thibela completed her Internship at Helen Joseph Hospital and her Community Service at Mapulaneng Hospital. Her ambition is to specialize in Neurosurgery, a testament to her dedication and passion for healthcare. Dr. Thibela is part of a new generation of medical professionals eager to contribute to improving healthcare access in Gauteng.

As we welcome Dr. Thibela today, it is also a moment to reflect on the journey of the 6th ANC-led administration, as highlighted by Premier Hendrik Lesufi during his State of the Province Address on Monday. The Premier eloquently recounted the path we have travelled, acknowledging both our triumphs and the challenges we have faced. Throughout this journey, the people of Gauteng have been our steadfast companions, walking alongside us and witnessing firsthand the experiences that have shaped our path to this final mile.

As we near the conclusion of this administration's term, it is crucial to reflect on the progress made and the impact on the lives of the people of Gauteng, especially regarding health and wellness. Premier Lesufi's address underscored this, emphasizing the importance of including the people of this province in our journey. They know what we have experienced because they have been with us every step of the way. By walking side by side with the people of Gauteng, our story as the ANC-led government cannot be contradicted because the truth is known by them.

And what is this truth?

Surgical Backlogs

Honorable members, the truth is that many people in our communities suffer from mobility issues, constant pain, and vision problems due to conditions like hip or knee fractures and cataracts. These health issues greatly impact their lives, but they often cannot afford the necessary surgeries.

To improve the quality of life for our people and prevent further harm from delayed surgeries, we have made significant progress in reducing backlogs and by February 20th, 85% of cataract, 84% of general surgery, and 79% of arthroplasty (knee and hip replacements) of backlogs had been addressed.

Surgical procedures like total hip and knee replacements are crucial, but they come with substantial costs. Cataracts, in particular, remain a leading cause of blindness in Africa. In June 2023, our province had a backlog of 37,000 of various procedures. Through dedicated efforts, we have reduced this backlog to 7,261 as of this week, with a goal to clear it entirely by March 2024.

This progress has been achieved through a concerted effort to prioritize these surgeries and ensure that those in need receive timely and quality care. It is a clear affirmation of our commitment to improving the lives of our people and reducing the burden of disease in our communities.

The success of our efforts in addressing surgical backlogs has had a profound impact on communities. People who were once living with debilitating pain, limited mobility and visual impairment as a result of cataracts are now able to live more comfortably and actively participate in their communities. Families have been spared the emotional and financial burden of caring for loved ones with chronic health issues. Overall, the reduction in surgical backlogs has contributed to a healthier and more vibrant province for all.

e-Panic Button and other ICT interventions in Health and Innovations

Madam Speaker, in the ever-evolving landscape of healthcare, the advent of digital technologies opens up a plethora of possibilities, offering transformative benefits for patient care and healthcare providers alike. Premier Lesufi underscored the pivotal role played by the GPG Panic Button, and we are advocating for our healthcare workers to download and utilize this application. Its significance is paramount, as it enhances security measures, crucially safeguarding our healthcare workforce against the backdrop of escalating crime levels that threaten their safety.

In the realm of the Health Information System, significant progress has been achieved. Three of the four modules, which encompass patient administration, billing, finance, and revenue, have been seamlessly integrated into all 37 hospitals and 33 Community Health Centers. The rigorous users' acceptance testing conducted by clinicians at all levels of care for the clinical module signifies its approval and readiness

for implementation. The system's deployment at Mamelodi Hospital is a critical milestone, signalling the commencement of the clinical module's rollout to all facilities, starting with central hospitals.

Furthermore, the commitment to advancing the implementation of the Picture Archiving and Communication System at Dr. George Mukhari Hospital holds promise for improved access to radiological imaging services, thereby enhancing diagnostic capabilities across the entire healthcare cluster.

In our relentless pursuit of operational efficiency and patient-centric care, the DablapMeds programme previously known as Central Chronic Medicine Dispense and Distribution continues to attract more users. This innovative initiative allows patients to collect their prescribed medications promptly upon notification, significantly reducing waiting times at healthcare facilities. The programme's impact is profound, with an impressive 1,338,709 patients currently registered. By January 2024, 710,340 patients had actively benefited from the programme, experiencing firsthand the convenience and efficiency it offers in medication management and distribution.

Moreover, the implementation of these digital healthcare initiatives underscores our commitment to embracing innovation and leveraging technology to enhance the quality of patient care, improve healthcare delivery, and ultimately, transform the healthcare landscape in Gauteng.

Acquisition of existing Hospitals: Expansion of Service Platforms for underserved communities

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, our commitment to enhancing the capacity of our healthcare system is rooted in our dedication to ensuring that every citizen has access to high-quality healthcare services. By leveraging accessible private hospitals, such as the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital, we aim to not only expand our service offerings but also ensure that our healthcare facilities are strategically located to meet the needs of our communities. This approach is vital in relieving the pressure on existing public healthcare institutions and improving overall healthcare delivery.

Our ongoing engagements with the private sector are crucial for accessing their service platforms and expertise. These partnerships are essential for enhancing the quality of our healthcare services and ensuring that we can effectively address the healthcare needs of the growing population of Gauteng. As these engagements progress, we are confident that we will be able to secure the support needed to strengthen the healthcare system.

In the coming months, we will provide further updates regarding the specific details. These announcements will not only demonstrate our commitment to transparency and accountability but also provide a roadmap for expanding healthcare access and improving healthcare outcomes across our nation.

Furthermore, the construction of Diepsloot / Olievenhoutbosch, Davetyton, New Orange Farm District Hospital and Soshanguve district hospitals underscores our commitment to improving Primary Health Care Platforms and meeting the growing healthcare needs of our population. These hospitals, once operational, will significantly enhance our healthcare infrastructure and improve access to healthcare services for communities across Gauteng. Site acquisition for these hospitals is a critical step in this process and signifies our commitment to delivering on our promise of quality healthcare for all.

Madam Chair, public health infrastructure serves as the foundation for delivering essential healthcare services to communities. The Department has made significant strides in upgrading existing facilities and constructing new ones to enhance healthcare accessibility and delivery. Our commitment to action is evident in the operationalization of six new clinics, as pledged in the 2023 State of the Province Address. These modern facilities are now providing vital services to the community, reflecting our dedication to improving healthcare access for all.

Our commitment to excellence in healthcare is exemplified by our specialized centers, which have led the way in advancing medical interventions and improving healthcare access. These centers have not only enhanced healthcare delivery but have also played a pivotal role in advancing medical research and training. Through our investment in health infrastructure, we have been able to provide hope and specialized care to a range of patients, particularly those requiring oncology and burns treatment.

The Zakithi Nkosi Paediatric Haematology and Oncology Clinic at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital stands as a beacon of hope for children with cancer and life-threatening blood disorders across South Africa. The clinic serves over 700 children with various cancers, including Leukaemia, Wilms tumour, and sarcoma, from different provinces in the country. This clinic is a testament to our commitment to providing specialized care and treatment to those in need.

The impact of our efforts extends beyond the clinic walls, reaching families and communities across the country. By providing specialized care and treatment, we are not only saving lives but also alleviating the burden on families and communities. Our investment in public health infrastructure is a testament to our commitment to providing quality healthcare for all, transforming healthcare delivery and bringing hope and healing to those in need.

Health Support for Gender Based Violence

I must also state that we have established a new Clinical Forensic Medicine Facility in Carletonville to support victims of Gender-Based Violence, sexual offences, human trafficking, and substance abuse. This facility is aimed at providing comprehensive care and support to survivors, including access to Thuthuzela Care Centres.

The newly opened facility in Carletonville is a significant step towards addressing the complex needs of survivors of GBV and related crimes. It serves as a safe space

where survivors can receive medical care, forensic examinations, counselling, and support services all under one roof.

By providing a full package of care, the facility ensures that survivors receive the necessary support to navigate the legal and medical processes following a traumatic experience. This comprehensive approach is crucial in addressing the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of survivors and facilitating their recovery.

The elevation of the facility to provide services equivalent to those offered at Thuthuzela Care Centres signifies a commitment to expanding access to specialized care for survivors of GBV and related crimes. It reflects a recognition of the importance of these services in ensuring that survivors receive the holistic care and support they need to heal and rebuild their lives.

Integrated School Health Campaign

Madam speaker, safeguarding the health and well-being of our children is paramount, underscoring the importance of the Integrated School Health Campaign. This initiative plays a crucial role in promoting comprehensive student health, ensuring they are physically and mentally prepared for learning and personal development. As part of the 2024 Back-to-School campaign, 33 schools were visited to conduct a range of health promotion activities.

These activities included educating students on crucial topics such as teenage pregnancy, family planning methods, suicide prevention, sexual behaviour, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). By providing students with information and tools to make informed decisions about their health, the campaign empowers them to lead healthier lives. Scientific investigations (evaluative research) will be prioritised to aid the refinement of teenage pregnancy social sector strategies and assist in developing data driven targeted interventions.

Furthermore, the deployment of seven school health mobile clinics on 14 February 2024 to priority townships across the five health districts of the province is a demonstration to the commitment to providing essential healthcare services to students. These clinics offer medical check-ups, vaccinations, and health screenings, contributing to the overall health and wellness of students and creating a conducive learning environment.

Support to TISH Communities and the Homeless

Honourable members another important point to raise is that, over the last 13 months, our primary focus for service delivery has been in our townships, informal settlements, and hostels. We have embarked on an aggressive drive to raise awareness through extensive life course health and wellness campaigns, which have far surpassed the annual target of reaching 12 million people.

Furthermore, we have extensively expanded our healthcare infrastructure and footprint to cover underserved areas, especially the TISH communities. For example,

we provide healthcare delivery to hostels once a week through mobile clinics. These efforts are evident in our services to six hostels, including Jeppe Hostel, LTA, George Koch Hostel, Marie and Roberts Hostel, Denver Hostel, and NBA Hostel.

Our commitment to "Less Talk, More Work" is reflected in the tangible outcomes of these initiatives. By focusing on these areas, we are not only addressing health inequalities but also working towards achieving health equity for all residents of Gauteng. These efforts are not just strategic; they are a demonstration of our dedication to ensuring that all residents have equal access to quality healthcare services, ultimately improving health outcomes and overall well-being in these communities.

Through our extensive life course health and wellness campaigns under the banner of #AsibeHealthyGP, we are empowering residents with knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about their health. This proactive approach is essential in promoting healthier lifestyles and preventing diseases, contributing to the overall well-being of our communities.

Jobs, Skills Development and Training

Premier, we have actively supported the NASI iSPANI initiative, resulting in 1031 job offers being made after shortlisting 870 positions and conducting 770 interviews. This demonstrates our commitment to creating job opportunities for the youth and contributing to economic growth.

We are immensely proud to announce that we have surpassed our target by training over 3000 community members as First Responders in Townships, Informal Settlements, and Hostels. This training aims to equip individuals with life-saving techniques while waiting for emergency services. Some of these trained individuals who meet EMS requirements will be recruited as EMS Interns, enhancing their skills and employability.

Conclusion

Madam speaker, as the 6th Administration concludes its term of office, there is no doubt that the Gauteng healthcare system is in a significantly better place. The administration's unwavering dedication to improving access to healthcare, enhancing service delivery, and investing in infrastructure has significantly strengthened the healthcare system. This progress lays a solid foundation for the 7th Administration to build on, ensuring that future healthcare initiatives are evidence-driven and impactful.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the people of Gauteng for their solid support and trust in the ANC-led government. Your continued commitment to the betterment of our province has been instrumental in achieving these remarkable milestones in healthcare. Your resilience and dedication have not gone unnoticed.

Looking ahead, the 7th Administration will inherit a healthcare system that is poised for even greater achievements. By continuing to prioritize evidence-driven decision-

making and investing in healthcare infrastructure and services, the administration can further improve the healthcare system in Gauteng. With your continued support, we are confident that we can build a healthier and more prosperous Gauteng for all.

As we approach the upcoming elections on 29 May 2024, we are grateful for continued commitment to support the ANC by the people of Gauteng. Your vote is not just a vote for a political party; it is a vote for the future of Gauteng. Together, we can overcome any challenges and continue to make progress towards a brighter tomorrow for all residents of Gauteng.

Thank you for your trust, your support, and your commitment to our shared vision of a better Gauteng for all.