



MEDIA STATEMENT

**TO ALL MEDIA
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EASTERN CAPE GOVERNMENT'S WEEKLY MEDIA STATEMENT | UPDATE ON THE CONTAINMENT AND MITIGATION OF COVID-19.

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Good morning members of the media and welcome to our weekly scheduled COVID-19 Press Conference. We want to address two important issues today. One is related to our healthcare response to COVID-19 and the other is related to the implementation of government priorities under alert level 2.

Closing Women's Month on a high.

Yesterday we closed Women's Month in our province, a month that is dedicated to the struggles that were waged and won by the women of our country who led a revolution against the unjust laws of the apartheid regime. Their resilience inspired us to persevere in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic that has visited our shores.

Our hope, determination and hard work during the Women's Month has paid dividends as we have seen a phenomenal reduction in the burden of COVID-19 disease in our province.

There is a reduction of the morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the COVID-19 cases occurred in July, 27,6% in June, and only 9,4% in August. Similarly, 50,9% of the deaths occurred in July, 27,6% in June, and 10,8%, in August.

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This shows that in the month of August our people have resisted the virus both in terms of infections and fatalities, as 86,0% of all the reported cases and 78,6% of the deaths occurred during the June-July period. Our hearts and prayers are with the families of the 310 people we lost during the Women's Month.

Entering the spring season with zeal

We enter the month of September, a month that is dedicated to celebrate our heritage and tourism, we are in a better footing than we anticipated as our epidemiological data signals that we are winning the fight against the virus than what was projected by various experts. Various models that were presented by health experts predicted that:

- COVID-19 cases will peak in July and early August, and that
- *Under almost all scenarios hospital and ICU capacity will be exceeded.*

Both these projections have been proven wrong, however we are glad that they were made because they pushed us to work with agility in responding to the virus in terms of encouraging our people to adhere to regulations and adequately resourcing our healthcare facilities to meet the demand for required medical resources and equipment, including hospital beds.

We enter the spring season encouraged by the fact that ninety-five percent (95%) of the individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 in our province have recovered, and all districts have the recovery rate that is above 90%. Just over 49,8% of the remaining 1 399 active cases in our province are concentrated in the Buffalo City Metro and Nelson Mandela Metro. This translates to 20.8 per 100 000 population against the 7 096 per 100 000 population we had on the 1st of August.

We continue to see great performance in the turnaround times for test results with 91.9 % available with 72 hours and 64.7 % results available within 24 hours. The number of hospitalizations, isolations, and persons on ventilators, ICU, High Care, and those on oxygen appears is decreasing significantly. We currently have 560 hospitalised patients in our province meaning our healthcare facilities are not under duress. On the 1st of August hospitalization stood at 942. The decrease in demand has created scope for us to refocus resource allocation to strengthen the entire health system going forward.

Threats to the public health

These outstanding results have not just happened by themselves. They are due to the resilience and discipline of the people who tested positive, friends and the families who supported them. They are due to the communities who continue to

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adhere to regulations of washing hands, wearing masks and social distancing. They are due to the long hours that have been sacrificed by our healthcare workers on the frontlines caring for the sick.

While we appreciate these results, we are not under the illusion that we have defeated this virus, thus we are not ceasing our efforts of completely stopping its spread in our communities. There are imminent threats to our fight against this virus and these are:

- The re-opening of schools which is a positive initiative that may have unintended consequences. The Department of Health is playing a critical role in supporting the Department of Education with effective surveillance system, monitoring and public health response.
- The impact of the sale of alcohol is another threat to the public health services. The sale of alcohol may result in an increase of trauma related cases which may overstretch the resources of the health system and expose patients and healthcare workers to possible infections.
- The misinterpretation of the level 2 regulations by the public is threatening to spark new cases. Some of our people are unfortunately thinking the war is over under level 2 and are going behaving recklessly. This can lead to emergence of clusters of COVID-19 cases and preventable deaths. We want to remind our people that **2,876** people lost their lives to this virus in our province and it is still deadly. We therefore plead with them to continue being vigilant by wearing their masks, washing their hands, and maintaining social distancing. Our biggest worry is alcohol users who go out of their homes to drink with friends whose infection status they do not know. They are putting the lives of their family members at risk.

In the month of September, we are going to focus on four things, and these are:

- Intensification of contact tracing and follow up on confirmed cases. We will ensure there is an effective implementation of the Track & Trace systems, which were implemented and the use of the information from these systems.
- Secondly, we will prioritise health promotion, education, and community engagement. We will strengthen risk communication and community engagement using health promoters and community healthcare workers to increase the knowledge index of the community. There must also be an increase in the visibility of health messages using mass communication, radio, TV, print media, and social media.
- Thirdly, we will protect healthcare workers as a strategy to protect patients and communities through improving surveillance of COVID-19 among healthcare workers and increasing the knowledgeability index of healthcare workers and managers at the facility level. This will include promotion of the use of PPE.
- Lastly, we will provide isolation and quarantine service to positive cases and their contacts within 24 and 48 hours to minimise further transmissions.

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Accelerating implementation of government priorities

We are now on alert level 2 and this means the business of government is in full swing with the implementation of the priorities that we announced during the tabling of the State of the Province Address and during tabling of policy speeches by MECs of our departments. We have had a 6 month delay due to the pandemic, so we are going to double our efforts to meet the targets we set ourselves. COVID-19 has shown us that we can achieve a lot when we work together in unison. That is the same ethos we are adopting as we heighten the implementation of our priorities which relate to healthcare provision, education, agriculture, food security and economic development amongst others.

We hold this press conference here in Mt Frere because we are visiting the Alfred Nzo District municipality where we have invested **R50.9 million** to refurbish healthcare facilities in the District which will benefit our people in this District beyond this pandemic.

We are at the Madzikane Ka Zulu Hospital where we invested **R332 000** for internal repair work on the existing building and plumbing which has been completed. There is now space with medical resources for 14 hospital beds with 4 High Care beds for the community that is serviced by this hospital.

Phase two of the facelift is underway and will be completed at the end of September, we are pumping in **R1.9 million** for rehabilitation of existing building to avail space with medical resources for 46 Covid-19 hospital beds with 2 High Care beds.

We injected **R2.1 million** at the **Mt Ayliff Hospital** to provide additional space with medical resources for 20 hospital beds with 5 high care beds using Alternative Building Technology.

For phase 1 of the **Taylour Bequest Hospital**, we injected **R1.6 million** to provide building space with medical resources for 20 additional hospital beds with 5 high care beds using Alternative Building Technology.

Work has started at **Siphethu Hospital** at a value of **R14. 4 million** to provide building space and medical resources for 30 new isolation beds with 5 high care beds for Covid-19.

We also want to monitor the readiness of the schools to welcome back all grades to complete the academic year. Inefficiencies in the resourcing of our schools has been exposed during this pandemic in areas of water, sanitation and poor buildings.

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Agriculture and food security

Our Province is endowed with natural resources making it possible for us to produce almost all-important agriculture commodities. The contribution of the Province to some of the popular commodities such as red meat and maize has not pitched on the expected value. The province is producing 40% of non-commercial sector grain and this is the opportunity to scale up to commercial level. The red meat and wool sector, the non-commercial EC sector contributes almost 5% of the weaners and wool marketed in the commercial value chains. The agriculture economic transformation strategy of the province seeks to assist subsistence, smallholder and black commercial farmers to increase agriculture production and participation in strategically identified commodities such as grain, livestock and horticulture.

The Province is currently investing in excess of **R200 million** to improve production and increase participation of smallholder and subsistence producer in the commercial value chains. The key food production initiative that are driven by DRDAR are 28 600 ha grain production (maize & soyabean), 990 ha vegetable production, poultry (120 000 broiler birds), redmeat (genetic improvement and custom feeding centres) and wool (genetic improvement). The special focus on household garden food production is targeted at indigent household.

We have made a total investment in various production infrastructure to the value of **R178 million**, this investment targets citrus (450 ha), vegetable, grain (400 km fence and storage facilities) and livestock infrastructure (190 km fence, 31 shearing sheds, 5 handling facilities, 62 boreholes and 182 dam rehabilitation projects).

The Alfred Nzo District in particular has the potential to be the grain hub of the Province based on abundant rainfall and rich soils. In Alfred Nzo a total of **R22 million** is allocated to plant 6 600 ha of grain and **R6.6 million** for 3 000 indigent household for food production. On infrastructure development, a sum of **R22.7 million** has been set aside to improve production infrastructure for smallholder and subsistence producer.

The District has been identified and targeted to be developed as the grain and red meat hub of the Province. Maize storage infrastructure is the next major infrastructure development in the region.

This week we will hand over 20 heifers to Ongelesnuk Farmer, 2 bulls to Eluphilisweni farmers, and these farmers include former soldiers of the Umkhonto Wesizwe. We will also join maize harvest day at Esibikhaya farm where a local farmer planted maize on 50 hectares of land. We will also hand over to beneficiaries the Mateleng livestock handling facility in Ward 16 of the Matatiele Municipality, Essek Multipurpose Shed in Ward 19, and Lugelweni Multipurpose

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Shed in Ward 8 of uMzimvubu municipality. All these activities are making agriculture fashionable in our province as a sector that contributes to economic growth, sustainable jobs, and food security.

Accelerating rural development

Today, we will also switch-on electricity in 246 households in Ntlangano village. We worked together with the Ntabankulu Municipality and Eskom to bring electricity to the community of Ntlangano who now have access to electricity through our investment. I know that other villages are yet to be connected to the grid and we can assure those communities that their turn is coming. We are also pleased by the progress we see on the installation of street lights, construction of the tar road, paving of the main street and assisting with the development of the designs for a transport hub for public transport in Mt Ayliff which we have done through our small revitalisation programme at a value of **R32 million**.

These projects are some of the major investments we have made to improve the lives and communities of the people of this district. We are determined to improve the lives of our people here in Alfred Nzo, community by community.

Jump starting economic recovery

As I indicated earlier that we are in the Heritage and Tourism Month, we aim to use the tourism sector to jump start our economy. We have a comparative advantage in tourism that is premised on the natural beauty of our province and its rich heritage.

In this regard the tourism sector is one of the sectors that are earmarked to benefit from the **R114.218 million** in additional funding has been made available to boost the economic recovery in the province post COVID-19.

HOD Resignation

As I close, I want to make an important announcement pertaining to the changes in the administrative leadership of the Provincial Department of Health. Our Head of Department, Dr Thobile Mbengashe resigned from the position of HOD and he will be leaving the department at the end of September.

On behalf of the provincial government, I want to thank Dr Mbengashe for his service to the people of our province. It was not the first time that he served the people of our province. He has served in various capacities, including in the liberation struggle where he was actively involved in fighting apartheid.

We thank him for his service because he used his skills, wisdom and expertise to

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serve the people of our province during his work at the department. He supported the province in the development of our provincial Multisectoral HIV and AIDS strategy through the Eastern Cape AIDS Council.

His skills and expertise will be of use in a different capacity from now onwards as I have appointed Dr Mbengashe as one of the special advisors to the Premier. He will be playing a strategic role of advising me on how we can continuously improve the provincial administration going forward. The good work we have done in the fight against COVID-19 is because we had him and his colleagues at the helm of the administration and strategic arm of the department of Health. We appreciate the contribution he made on that front.

We want to continue our partnership with the media of providing the media with fresh content on how we are improving their lives and responding to their challenges. **Thank you.**

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