

REMARKS BY EASTERN CAPE MEC FOR HEALTH, N. METH AT THE INAUGURAL MENTAL HEALTH LECTURE ON 10 OCTOBER 2023

Programme Director

Pastor Mqamelo from SACC,

OR Tambo District Community Services MMC, Hon. Cllr Gcingca

King Sabata Dalindyebo Local Municipality Chief Whip, Hon. Cllr Mlanjeni

Ms Mfaine, from SA Human Rights Commission

**Our esteemed panellists: Dr Aboobaker, Ms Bebeza, Mr. Sithomo and Mr. Tshali
ECDoH DDGs**

District managers

CEOs of our hospitals

Mental Health Review Board members

Traditional Health Practitioners present, O.R. Tambo chairperson, Pumla Jezile (MamGcina) and Noyise Sisu (umaDosini)

SAYC representatives, Mr Vuyo Tologu and Mr Mesuli Cwele

Our social partners,

Invited guests

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning,

Allow me to first apologise as I will have to be excused shortly after speaking to join the physical Legislature plenary session where I will be tabling the ECDOH Annual report.

This is an important gathering as we commemorate World Mental Health Day under the theme: **“Mental health is a universal human right”**. Mental health is receiving responsiveness from the Eastern Cape Department of Health.

When we speak of mental health as a human right, we are acknowledging that, every person has the right to live a life free from discrimination, stigma and prejudice related to their mental health status.

No one should be subjected to discrimination or have their opportunities limited due to mental health challenges. This right includes access to appropriate mental health care, support systems and resources. We are duty-bound to ensure that these services are not only available, but also accessible, affordable and of high quality.

As we strive to improve the quality of service we offer to the millions of people who depend on the public sector for their healthcare needs, mental health cannot be left behind. We cannot talk human rights and leave out mental health.

We note with concern, the changes in nurse training curriculum especially psychiatric nursing. The South African Nursing Council (SANC), surely has the best interests of our patients at heart, as the country is facing an aging workforce in specialised categories of healthcare professionals. It is a fact that, as the public sector, we are the main trainer of specialist nurses, providing for both public and private health facilities. The changes in training programs will soon be felt across our mental health services.

We appointed the Mental Health Review Boards to strengthen our adherence in maintaining and upholding the rights of mental health users in the department. The department took the recommendations of the health ombudsman seriously and addressed the majority of them.

To strengthen leadership, we appointed a director for mental health and registered counsellors.

On assumption of office in the department, I adopted Mental Health as my special program. It is on this reason that I appointed Mental Health Registered counsellors and used my powers to create these posts additional to the organogram. Out of 31 posts, **Twenty-six (26)** mental health registered counsellors have already been appointed. Others declined the offers, but we are confident we will fill the **five (5)** remaining posts.

Since their appointment, there has been an improvement in access to psychological services by communities. In less than a year, registered counsellors in all districts have seen **nine hundred and eighty-seven (987)** clients and conducted **twenty-eight (28)** public education events, increasing access to psychological services and possible prevention of mental illness.

This, ladies and gentlemen is **a story of good progress**, because, for the longest time we did not have registered counsellors.

We recently appointed the CEOs at Fort England and Tower hospitals. We are confident that they will provide leadership and ensure that our mental health users are given the best care they can get. The recruitment of a CEO for Komani Psychiatric hospital is at an advanced stage.



We are also recruiting mental health specialists for Komani, Tower and Fort England hospitals. The department is also considering introducing eHealth in order to improve access to mental health services.

Our hospitals provide 72-hour- observation services. This is over and above the dedicated state-of-the-art child and adolescent mental health unit at Fort England, which the department spent **R29.1-million** renovating.

This is an indication that when we say we are giving mental health services the attention they deserve, we mean it.

Mental health is integrated in primary health care including school health programme in our country because we are concerned about the well-being of our population.

This is also in line with the UN General Assembly's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 3 talks about ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

If we don't make mental health and well-being for all a global priority – we will not achieve goal 3.

The National Development Plan and the Provincial Development Plan also stress the importance of ensuring that we have universal health coverage by 2030. If we are to achieve universal health coverage, mental health cannot be left behind.

The purpose of the governing party in strengthening community mental health is to ensure:

- Equitable access to 72-hour mental health assessment units;
- Safety of healthcare workers (HCW) and patients while undergoing 72-hour assessment;
- This requires adequate infrastructure, appropriate medication, and appropriate knowledge and skills of HCWs; and
- Adequate knowledge of the Mental Health Care Act (MHAC) and the correct use of MHCA forms.

Ladies and gentlemen, statistics have shown that mental illness is the third highest contributor to the burden of disease, whilst **16.5%** of South Africans suffer from a mental disorder in a given 12 months, about **75%** have not had the benefit of receiving treatment.

We must double our efforts and ensure that everyone who is in need of mental health services get the help they need. It is only through treatment that mental health issues can be managed.

Sadly, there is still stigma associated with mental illnesses, especially in black communities. This is one of the biggest challenges that we are still faced with today when it comes to mental illness.

As we continuously strive to improve mental health services, we must also ensure that we de-mystify the myths around mental health. With treatment, people with mental health challenges are able to play active roles in society.



As a department, we had our first strategic planning and policy review workshop in August this year, with contributions from relevant stakeholders, with the following as Priorities:

- Strengthening community based services to improve early identification of mental illness and improving community living areas
- Prioritise the appointment and functioning of District Mental Health Specialist Teams
- Build and strengthen community Mental health services in CHCs
- Improving 72- hour -observation units and infrastructure in designated District, Regional, and Tertiary hospitals
- Improving efficiency of hospital services for better health outcomes
- Improving screening of mental health patients at PHC and district level through deployment of Registered Counsellors in clinics and CHCs
- Re-capacitation of the Clinical personnel on Mental Health Programmes and direct highly skilled advanced mental health nurses from Specialised hospitals to serve at PHC level where they will diagnose and treat patients
- Strengthening the services for Child and Adolescent mental health services, and lastly,
- Focusing on rehabilitation of mental health care users in hospitals and community settings

All of us, at some point in our lives, face mental health challenges due to life pressures, let us take better care of ourselves and look after our mental health.

Managers must create a conducive work environment for their staff to thrive. A toxic work environment can also contribute to mental health issues.

We must also move away from being a Department of Health but be a Department of Health and Wellness. Prioritising the wellness of healthcare workers is essential to maintaining a healthy and motivated workforce.

Promoting physical and mental health, encouraging healthy coping mechanisms, and promoting work-life balance are essential for maintaining a healthy and motivated workforce.

By investing in the wellness of our workers, we will ensure that healthcare workers are better equipped to provide the highest quality care to our people. Being a healthcare worker is demanding and can be frustrating because at times healthcare workers deal with very serious issues.

Let us make time for activities outside work, which can help reduce stress levels, improve mental health and also improve the quality of life.

Mental health goes beyond being a family or government issue. It is a societal issue that needs all of us. We see in our communities, a new phenomenon of mothers killing their children. Can this be attributed to mental health issues? We acknowledge the impact of other social determinants of health on mental well-being.



Professionals are here today to help us understand in-order to address the scourge of violence against innocent children and women. When we hear of GBV incidents, we wonder where have we lost the values of Ubuntu and respect for human life as a society.

Coping mechanisms and support systems need to be strengthened through counselling services for those struggling with life demands. In an ideal world, we would teach communities life skills so that they will not ostracise people with mental illnesses. A culture that says indoda ayikhali, indoda mayiqine, a culture that says indlovu ayisindwa ngumboko wayo, need to be looked into as such utterings tend to ignore the tough economic times we live in.

The launch of this inaugural mental health lecture is part of ensuring that we invite guests who are specialists in their respective fields to address us on this important subject.

We want to come up with strategies and tactics that will ensure that mental health rights are mainstreamed in our daily activities so as to benefit those marginalised and vulnerable members of our society.

These lecture series will rotate to all health districts to ensure that we leave no district without vigorously engaging on mental health awareness strategies.

It is our intention to partner with the private sector and other social partners to directly support our mental health users.

We need everyone to play their part. Traditional leaders, the religious fraternity, traditional health practitioners, institutions of higher learning, civil society and communities have a role to play. We need all hands on deck if we are to turn the corner.

I want to also make a call to psychiatrists both in the public and private sector to join us in the fight of promoting, treating and rehabilitating those directly and indirectly affected by mental health.

Programme director, we must also say that in some cases, mental health issues are as a result of drug abuse. We cannot run away from that sad reality. This is why we must always at every opportunity that we get, drum it into our youth, so that they don't abuse alcohol and drugs. Substance abuse, as a survival strategy or experimental due to peer pressure, at any given age, or genuinely ukuthibaza iingcinga ngezimongameleyo umntu, has become a major contributing factor to mental health issues.

The youth are the future of this great nation so we need them to be mentally fit and healthy, so that when the time comes for them to pick up the baton, they will be able to take us to the promised land.

In conclusion, I want to thank Old Mutual and Sanlam for sponsoring the Community Mental Health Award to the value of **twenty thousand (R20 000)**, AVBOB for the wonderful decoration, Liberty and Metropolitan for supporting the event by sponsoring beverages.



I implore all these companies to continue walking and working with us. I also urge management to form more partnerships and collaborations, because we cannot achieve everything that we want to achieve if we work alone.

The austerity measures will also require us to box smart and leverage on partnerships. There's an African proverb that says "If you want to walk fast walk alone, if you want to walk far, walk together".

Already we are a department with budgetary constraints, so let us continue doing more with the little that we have.

I thank you.

