

**Keynote Address by the Eastern Cape Health MEC at the World Aids Day Commemoration held on December 1, 2025.**

The Civil Society Chairperson and the Co-Chairperson of the Eastern Cape AIDS Council,  
Mr Melikhaya Lusiti

Members of the Provincial Legislature

The Executive Mayors and the Local Mayors, who are also the chairpersons of the District and Local AIDS Councils

The Private Sector Chairperson Ms Chwayita Zituta

Members of the Eastern Cape AIDS Council

Development partners

And most importantly, the people of Nelson Mandela Bay and the people of the Eastern Cape at large

I greet you all this morning...

Today, we gather here with a shared and profound sense of responsibility to confront the HIV and TB epidemics with courage, unity, and unwavering resolve. As the Eastern Cape Health MEC, it is both my honour and my solemn duty to reflect on the progress we have made, acknowledge the challenges that remain before us, and outline the decisive actions we must take to change and uplift the health trajectory of our province.

This year's World AIDS Day is focusing on two key campaigns: 1.1 million Close the ART Gap and 5 million End TB campaigns. The target groups for the year's World AIDS Day commemoration are youth, women, men and children.

While there are high rates of testing and treatment access, the province has not yet reached the 95-95-95 target. Provincial data shows that in June 2025, the results for adults were 94-78-93, and for children who are or under 15 years, 88-75-77. The province is also performing poorly on the management of indicators for males at 93-72-93.

According to the 1.1. million close the ART Gap campaign to achieve the target, the province needs to find and initiate 148,322 people for ART.

In the district split, Nelson Mandela Bay has the highest number of people to initiate on the ART in the province at 34 842, followed by OR Tambo (29 670) and BCMM (21 765). For TB, the province must find and test 847,995 people. Of this, Nelson Mandela Bay has the second highest number to test at 153 643 after OR Tambo (156 691).

In view of this data, Nelson Mandela Bay has been identified as the provincial platform to host this year's World AIDS Day. These figures highlight the significant challenges the district faces in achieving the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets. Hosting the main World AIDS Day event here sends a powerful message that we are fully committed to closing the treatment gap, intensifying interventions, and accelerating progress toward ensuring that everyone living with HIV and TB has access to life-saving care.

I would like to take a moment to sincerely congratulate the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality for the outstanding commitment, dedication, and visionary leadership they have demonstrated in ensuring the success of this year's World AIDS Day event. Under the guidance of Executive Mayor Cllr Lobishe, the municipality has worked tirelessly to coordinate efforts, mobilise stakeholders, and prioritise the health and well-being of its communities.

This achievement has been made possible through strong partnerships with Civil Society, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Development, the Department of Education, and SAPS, showcasing the power of collaboration and shared responsibility in addressing some of our most pressing health challenges.

This event is far more than a ceremonial gathering. It is a call to action. It reminds us that when communities, government, and partners unite with purpose and resolve, we can drive meaningful change, save lives, and advance toward a future where no child is born with HIV, stigma is eliminated, and every person has access to the life-saving treatment

they need. The leadership and example set by Nelson Mandela Bay serve as an inspiration for all districts to step up and work together toward these critical goals.

Our provincial performance forms part of a much broader national picture one that calls for urgent and intensified action. South Africa must close an estimated 1.1 million–person ART gap, representing individuals who are living with HIV yet are not receiving the life-saving treatment they need and deserve. This is not merely a statistic; it is a call to action. It demands strengthened coordination across all levels of government, deeper community mobilisation, and stronger partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and development partners.

For the Eastern Cape, the expectations are clear. Under the 1.1 million Close the Gap Campaign, our province was allocated a target of identifying 148,322 people living with HIV and linking each of them to care and treatment. To meet this commitment, we are expected to reach a Total Remaining on ART (TROA) of 755,693 by December 2025.

As of October 2025, the Eastern Cape reported a TROA of 636,793, which represents 84% of our allocated target. This demonstrates solid progress, but it also means we must increase treatment uptake by an additional 59,450 people in just two months. This is ambitious but it is not beyond our reach. With strengthened political will, intensified mobilisation, and coordinated campaigns across the districts, I am confident that we can and will meet this target.

Equally important is our performance under the 5 million End TB Campaign, which aims to drastically expand TB testing, diagnosis, and treatment. By October 2025, the Eastern Cape was expected to have completed 1,021,142 TB NAAT tests. I am encouraged to report that the province has already conducted 277,913 tests, representing an early and significant overachievement. This strong performance provides a solid foundation, and if we maintain this momentum, we are well-positioned to meet — and even exceed — the provincial target by March 2026.

Colleagues, these figures are not merely administrative targets. They represent mothers, fathers, young people, and children whose lives depend on the strength and

responsiveness of our health system. They represent families who deserve hope, communities seeking support, and a province determined to write a new chapter in its HIV and TB response.

Let today serve as a reminder that progress is possible — and that with unity, accountability, and unwavering commitment, we can close the treatment gap, we can end TB, and we can move decisively toward ending HIV and TB as public health threats by 2030.

The latest provincial 95-95-95 HIV Treatment Cascade, as of September 2025, provides us with both encouragement and a clear call to action. We have reached 94-79-93 for the total population served across the public and private sectors. This performance shows that we are closing gaps, but it also reminds us that the journey is far from over.

When we examine the sub-populations more closely, we see critical variations:

- Adult females stand at 95-82-93,
- Adult males at 93-73-93,
- Children under 15 at 88-77-78.

These statistics tell a profound story. They reflect communities that are striving, health workers who are working tirelessly, and systems that are improving—but they also highlight groups that require more dedicated and targeted support. Children, men, and adolescent and young people remain among the most vulnerable and underserved.

This year's theme "**Renewed Efforts and Sustainable Commitments to End HIV**" must be our rallying point. It calls upon each of us to recommit to a future where every person in the Eastern Cape has access to life-saving treatment; where no child is born with HIV; where stigma and discrimination have no place in our communities; and where no one absolutely no one is left behind.

But as we reflect on our progress, let us remember that data alone will not help us win this battle. What will help us win is partnerships, the collective strength of all government departments working side by side with civil society, traditional leadership, development

partners, and the private sector. It is through strong, well-functioning AIDS Councils at provincial, district, local, and ward levels that we can truly drive a robust multi-sectoral response.

We must strengthen testing uptake, improve treatment adherence, expand access to services, and intensify community mobilisation. And we must do so with innovation, agility, and a willingness to dismantle every barrier that prevents our people from knowing their HIV status, initiating treatment, and remaining virally suppressed.

This year, we are placing particular focus on men, youth, and children — groups who continue to carry a disproportionate burden of the epidemics in our province. It is deeply concerning that the Eastern Cape still faces significant challenges in the management of HIV among children. It has been one year since we joined the Global Alliance to End AIDS in Children, and while we have started to see modest improvements, the pace is not yet where it must be. I urge all ECAC stakeholders to maintain the momentum of activations across the province and intensify their support for our children, to strengthen early diagnosis, ensure rapid treatment initiation, and improve viral load monitoring.

We must also expand men's health corners, enhance youth-friendly services, and create safe, accessible environments across our province where people feel supported, respected, and empowered to engage with the health system.

Let us leverage the valuable lessons learned from the support provided by our U.S. partners and convert them into sustainable, home-grown solutions tailored to the realities of our largely rural province. Working together, with renewed effort and sustained commitment, we can and we will change the trajectory of HIV and TB in the Eastern Cape.

HIV is not a health problem; it is a development problem. It is everyone's business. It requires strong partnerships. Private sector support is crucial, particularly for reaching hard-to-reach groups, and requires a collective effort and understanding from employers

who prioritise the employees' health. Synchronising resources towards shared goals is essential for provincial success.

**Vision: Eliminate HIV and TB as public health threats by 2030.**

**Priorities in the Eastern Cape include:**

1. Integration of HIV, TB and STI response into government planning and budgets
2. Address the social enablers of HIV transmission (social and structural drivers like GBV, human rights violations, stigma and discrimination). We are not giving these areas enough attention, yet they play a significant role in perpetuating the spread of the epidemic.
3. Establishment and strengthening of community-led interventions that allow communities to take the lead in the fight against HIV.
4. Build resilient health systems, robust community systems, and a strong social protection for the sustainability of the response.
5. Adequate financing of the HIV, TB and STI response
6. Strong partnerships to drive an effective and sustainable multisectoral response

**In summary:**

Sustained success requires a complete mind shift from seeing HIV as a health problem that is therefore the responsibility of the Department of Health. It requires the involvement of all government departments. Sustained success requires a shift in seeing communities as passive recipients of services but rather see them but as participants in changing the trajectory of the epidemics.

Sustained success requires strong partnerships with all stakeholders, effective data management, expanded facility readiness, and coordinated multi-sectoral efforts that

present an Eastern Cape where every person has access to life-saving treatment, children are protected, and HIV and TB are effectively controlled.

As we journey through the remaining four years to the 2030 vision of eliminating HIV and TB as public health threats, I call upon all sectors:

Let us strengthen our partnerships. Let us invest more boldly in prevention, treatment, and social support. Let us support our communities. And above all, let us protect the dignity and well-being of every person living in our province.

Together, we can and we will achieve the 95-95-95 targets. Together, we can create an Eastern Cape where HIV no longer steals lives, hopes, or futures. Together, we can reach the global vision of eliminating HIV and TB as public health threats by 2030.

I thank you.