

Media Statement
10 October 2023

EC Department of Health marks World Mental Health Day.

MTHATHA - Eastern Cape Department of Health MEC Nomakhosazana Meth has called for the stigma associated with mental health to be removed in society as the province commemorates World Mental Health Day.

Meth was addressing over two hundred guests who packed the Mthatha Health Resource Center lecture hall during the mental health annual lecture on Tuesday.

Meth said one could not: "talk human rights and leave out mental health."

But she said sadly, there was 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," said Meth.

"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."

Meth said her department had its first strategic planning and policy review workshop in August this year, with contributions from relevant stakeholders.

"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."

According to the latest statistics, mental illness was 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 ! of receiving treatment.

Meth said she also appointed the Mental Health Review Boards to strengthen the department's 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," said Meth.

She further explained that out of 31 posts, twenty-six (26) mental health registered counsellors had already been appointed.

She said others declined the offers, but she was confident that she would soon fill the five (5) remaining posts.

She said that since the appointments were made, there had 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 is a story of good progress because, for the longest time, we did not have registered counselors. 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."

Meth said the recruitment of a CEO for Komani Psychiatric Hospital was 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, in which the department spent R29.1-million renovating," Meth said.

Meth said that was a clear indication that her department was giving mental health services the attention it deserved.

She said she wanted screening of mental health patients at primary health care (PHC) and district level improved through deployment of registered counsellors in clinics and 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.

The event was sponsored by Old Mutual and Sanlam, who sponsored the Community Mental Health Award to the value of twenty thousand (R20 000). AVBOB sponsored the decoration, Liberty, and Metropolitan supporting the event by sponsoring beverages.

