

The Weekly

GOVERNMENT ESCALATES HIV/AIDS TREATMENT

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Improving health care ... The MEC for Health, Dr. Benny Malakoane wants to

HIV positive patients will now have access to fixed dose combination drug that will be introduced next month in the province. Health MEC, Dr. Benny Malakoane, announced this during his budget speech in Reddersburg last week.

Thirty one hospitals in the province and 224 public health care facilities render HIV counseling and testing (HCT) services. There are over 1.3 million people who have been screened for HIV and Aids. The TB-HIV co-infected patients initiated on Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) treatment increased from 81.2 percent to 85.3 percent in 2011/2012.

During this financial year, 816 458 people will be counseled and tested for HIV. The new fixed dose combination drugs will be introduced from April. The dose is a three in one tablet that will be firstly given to new patients and pregnant women with the HIV. There will be 4 070 more children under 15 years that will be put on Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) during this financial year.

Ninety percent of patients with both HIV and TB will also benefit from this therapy. The HIV mother-to-child transmission rate decreased from seven percent in 2010 to three percent in 2012. Sixteen new clinics and 16 modular structures for HIV and Aids have been completed in different districts of the province.

“The Introduction of the new Fixed Dose Combination drugs as from April 1, 2013, to make treatment easier for HIV positive patients, by taking only one tablet a day costing R89 instead of three tablets three times a day costing R400 a month. These new drugs will be phased in with priority given to new patients and pregnant women as per the new treatment guidelines,” said Malakoane.

The department intends to increase family health teams from 42 to 70 in order to improve primary health care outreach services to the community.

“To strengthen primary health care re-engineering and the comprehensive management of HIV/AIDS and TB, we will further enroll the following Categories for training: 35 professional nurses in primary health care courses; 500 student nurses for a four year diploma in nursing science and 600 professional Nurses on Initiated Management of ART (NIMART).”

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The department provides health services to 912 of the 961 no fees schools in the province. These schools are mostly in historically disadvantaged communities. In distributing needed chronic medication, the department is using scooters. These scooters will now be increased to twenty six.

Malakoane wants to ensure that the department's R7.8-billion for the 2013/2014 is spent judiciously. The Free State department of health has made strides in increasing life expectancy and reducing the prevalence of quadruple diseases; HIV and Aids, and tuberculosis.

Maternal and child mortality rate have also decreased significantly in the province. However, there is a need for the department to improve its spending patterns.

Malakoane is upbeat that his four point plan will take the department to greater heights. The plan includes implementation of financial recovery plan intended to address the current financial woes in the department. During the provincial budget speech, the former MEC for finance, Seiso Mohai, highlighted the need for the health department to urgently sort out its finances and Malakoane intends to do just that.

"Firstly, a financial recovery plan intended to address the current financial woes without compromising our mandate by implementing prudent financial management system and processes."

The MEC wants to undertake a comprehensive audit of human resource to create a "productive personnel infrastructure" within the next three months. He also wants to improve staff morale, professionalism and productivity by focusing on improving the management of the department.

According to Malakoane, the department will also improve district health services. He said district hospitals are important to the implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme.

"We shall continue the monitoring of queues in all hospitals, with a view of reducing patient's waiting time in key service areas. For example out-patient department, casualty department and pharmacies. All 24 district hospitals will be assessed for compliance against priorities of the core standard for health services."

The department will open a new hospital in Ladybrand named after Senorita Ntlabathi with 71 beds in May this year.

In partnership with the department of sports, arts, culture and recreation, the department of health will run a health campaign in province's four districts and the metro to promote healthy lifestyle. The campaign will raise awareness and educate society about the risks of smoking, harmful use of alcohol, poor diet and lack of exercise.

Malakoane wants 95 percent of children under one year to be immunised in the province. To promote women's health, 56 percent of women will be screened for cervical cancer. The months of April and May are set aside to ensure participation in the national polio and measles campaign.

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