

Health Overview 2006



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



PROVIDING BETTER HEALTHCARE SERVICES

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Message from the Minister of Health

The promise of “health for all” which was made by the World Health Organisation in the 1970s is still a dream of all governments, whether in developed or developing countries. This is indeed a vision that guides the South Africa Department of Health with regard to our mission of improving access to health care.

The provision of health services and the improvement in health indicators – such as, reducing infant and maternal mortality — are complex as they depend both on what is done to strengthen the health system and also the environment in which people live, work and recreate. Despite these complexities, I am very proud of the interventions that we have made both within South Africa and internationally to improve the health of our people.

This short booklet records some of the achievements of the Department of Health, both nationally and in each of our nine provinces to improve the health system. Obviously, the road to the full transformation of the health system is a long one and the task is not complete. I am confident however, that we have put in place the building blocks for a system that will take us a long way toward making health for all a reality.

2006 has been declared by the WHO as the year in which we will celebrate our health workers. I therefore take great pride in saluting all our health workers and thank each of them for their contribution to making health for all a more attainable dream in South Africa.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a yellow rectangular background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'M. Tshabalala'.

Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang
Minister of Health
May 2006

Introduction

One of the greatest advantages any country can offer its people is the opportunity for good health.

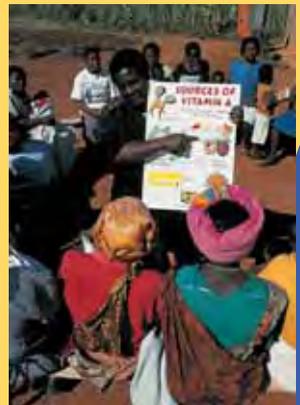
An effective health care system stands firmly at the centre of our programmes to safeguard the health of our people. Our vision for the health system is “an accessible, caring and high quality health system”.

But we must not lose sight of the fact that we require more than good health care services for a healthy nation. We need, for example, to score major victories in combating poverty, creating employment, providing education and ensuring access to proper housing, clean water and adequate sanitation. Our goal must be a nurturing environment in which people can thrive.

The national Department of Health and its provincial counterparts are responsible for ensuring that health care is available to every person living in South Africa. It is, therefore, our mission to build a health care delivery system that will ensure:

- It becomes easy for everyone to access the health services they need.
- Inequality in availability and quality of care is reduced and eventually wiped out.
- There is adequate funding for health care – whether from government or consumers’ pockets – and it is used efficiently.
- Quality of care is good, both in terms of medical results and respect for patients.
- The system is sustainable and can be relied on at all times.

The national health system belongs to all of us. Service providers in the public and



private sectors must therefore work together to ensure that we provide the best possible access to care of a high standard at a cost our country can afford.

During the first decade of democracy the foundation was laid for health care for all. Given the size of the task of transformation, in the second decade the national health system is still under construction. We are building new hospitals and clinics, building management systems, building up our human resources, repositioning public, private and non-profit services, and reinforcing links with communities.

Many programmes that began several years ago are being sustained and scaled up in the present phase. These include strengthening the first level of care, offered through thousands of clinics and community-based programmes, and renewing our hospitals through the Hospital Revitalisation Programme. They also include programmes to protect the health of people and to prevent disease.

Two large areas of activity stand out boldly above all else on our priority list.

The first is improving the number of skilled health workers employed in our public hospitals and clinics and available to other health services within South Africa. Government recognises that the future of our national health system depends to a critical extent on our ability to train enough health professionals with the right skills and to hold on to this human gold. South Africa invests an enormous amount in producing health workers and our challenge is to create conditions that will motivate professionals to give back to the people through sustained public service.



The second top priority is linked to the human factor: It is improving the quality of health care, in a number of ways:

- Ensuring that there is a caring service ethic in all our health facilities, not only the best ones.
- Striving for the best possible standards of medical treatment through good training and the availability of appropriate technology.
- Paying much greater attention to strategies for preventing illness and promoting health.

Community participation plays a critical role in ensuring quality health care, both by guiding services in our clinics and hospitals, and through programmes to prevent illness and build a healthier nation.

Health depends as much on the way we live as it does on the expertise of our doctors and nurses, our hospitals and clinics. It depends on the food we eat, the types of houses we live in, and the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink – how we sleep, play, work, make love and raise our children. Some of these things are decided by the individual, and some by forces beyond the individual.

Because of this we not only encourage individuals to take responsibility for their health, but we also look to a range of leaders and organisations to become involved in programmes to promote health and prevent disease. With organisations acting together we can touch the lives of individuals and we can reshape our environment to support the health of our people.

This is the key to the breakthrough we urgently need to halt the spread of communicable diseases, such as malaria, TB and HIV. It is also our hope against the non-communicable diseases, like diabetes, hypertension and heart disease.

We will not neglect the building of health facilities and ensuring the supply of drugs and equipment in the years ahead. But our focus will be firmly on people – on our health workers and on our community partners in this massive task of building a healthier nation.

The health system

The public health sector is the lifeline on which 80% of South Africans depend. About 40- million people are cared for through some 4 100 clinics and 400 hospitals, receiving services ranging from community-based and primary health care to highly specialised treatment.

The private health care sector serves far fewer people. About 7-million people meet their health needs almost entirely through the private sector. On the surface the private health care sector is self-financing, but it actually benefits from a large state subsidy through tax rebates on medical scheme contributions.

The average spending on each individual covered is about eight times higher in the private sector than in the public sector.



When it makes health policy, government seeks to safeguard the viability of all parts of the health system while striving for a more equitable and fair sharing of resources between the private and public health services.

The need to address equity between the private and public health sectors prompted the Department of Health to engage in a process to produce a Health Charter. This Charter will provide a framework for the two sectors to engage on a wide range of issues, including mechanisms to use our total health resources for the benefit of all the country's people and to increase the ownership share of black people in private sector health companies.

Nationwide primary health care District-based organisation of services

When government faced the task of replacing apartheid health care with a system able to serve all our people, it chose the district health system as the vehicle to delivery primary health care services. This system aims to provide border-to-border health coverage by dividing the entire country into health districts and to deliver a standard package of primary health care services in each health district. Each health district has a manager with the authority to ensure that all clinics, health centres and district hospitals work together as part of an organised unit.

The idea of a district health system is to spread health resources evenly across the country and to see that everyone has good access to appropriate care. In reality, health planners and managers could not entirely escape the inequalities of the past. The districts have been built across town and township. Some are situated entirely in former homelands that were poorly developed. So achieving equal access to care of equal quality requires persistent effort.

In the first decade

- Health districts were set up across the country. There are 53 of them and their boundaries coincide with metropolitan and district municipalities.
- More than 1 300 clinics and health centres were built or upgraded so that districts had the infrastructure to provide accessible health care.
 - Fees for this first level of care were scrapped in 1996 in order to ensure that the poorest families could have access to health care.