

**SPEECH OF THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF HEALTH
AT THE ROTARY FAMILY HEALTH DAY EVENT
WEDNESDAY 8th NOVEMBER 2023: CITY OF MANGAUNG,
FREE STATE**

Programme Directors:

Mayor, Cllr:

CEO of Action Group for Family health and AIDS Prevention, Ms Sue Paget

Rotary International President Elect:

Deputy Chairperson of SANAC:

SANAC CEO, Dr Thembisile Xulu

Representative of the US Agencies:

Representatives of UN Agencies:

Senior managers and officials of the National and Provincial Departments of Health

Partners, Colleagues, Community members, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

We have come together this day, to celebrate the 11 years of partnership since 2013 between the Department of Health and the Rotary Action Group for Family Health and AIDS Prevention in the delivery of this critical outreach event: The Rotary Family Health Days campaign, which is currently part of the annual Health calendar.

Let me first congratulate the Rotarians for their resilience and tenacity in the continuous support of South Africa's response to HIV and AIDS, TB and Mother Child and Women Health in South Africa.

The 10th launch of the Rotary Family Health Days 2023 prioritises women, mothers and children through a clarion call to mobilise unvaccinated children, zero dose communities, heightening mother-baby pairing programme and intensify awareness in schools to encourage mothers to immunise their babies. This aligns to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and meeting the commitments made in the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health. Currently the country is at 12.7/1000 against the target of 12/1000 live births in neonatal mortality. Progress for under five mortality is 28/1000 against the target of 25/1000 live births. Institutional maternal mortality is 101/100 000 against the target of 70/100 000 live births. This performance is the re-bounce from the COVID-19 pandemic of 121/100 000 live births. We are optimistic that accelerated and coordinated efforts like this will assist us to achieve the pre-COVID-19 maternal mortality ratio which was 88/ 100 000 live births.

As indicated in the theme of the day of building stronger mother-baby pair interventions (as explicitly described in our newly approved Maternal and Neonatal Guideline) is critical. Most importantly, we are also working to reduce transmission of infections from mother to babies, it is my privilege to report that South Africa started the validation process to "Path to Elimination of Vertical transmission of HIV, Syphilis and Hepatitis B".

In 2022, we had challenges of vaccine preventable diseases outbreaks such as measles where almost all provinces in the country had outbreaks. We thank you for the efforts of bringing all children under 15 years for vaccination, we are still calling for parents to bring their under five children for vaccination so that we improve the immunisation coverage from 82% to

95%. In January 2024 we will be introducing other new vaccines such as Rubella vaccine to make sure that children are fully protected.

Since 1985, Rotary has had an interest in Polio eradication. Much progress has been made to date, surveillance processes, readiness drills to respond in case we have the confirmed Polio case and to identify possible warning signs of re-emergence of Polio. Recently, we are challenged by Polio outbreaks in neighbouring countries. We are therefore raising awareness on possible polio cases. Report any cases of Acute Flaccid Paralysis (this is when a child who was able to walk suddenly is unable to walk properly). If you are not sure visit your nearest health facility for help. We cannot afford to have resurgence of Polio in our countries.

We have also made progress in reducing HIV in children and adolescents. While there is remarkable progress on the 95-95-95 cascade for adults, children and adolescents are left behind at 82-68-67. In simple terms we have 70 457 children who need to be linked to care. Today we are calling on the whole society to join us in strengthening interventions through the Global Alliance to end AIDS in children by 2030. This collaboration requires civil society, other government departments and other key stakeholders to ensure that we leave no one behind. The four pillars of interventions are, (1) Case finding of exposed infants and children, (2) treatment for pregnant and breastfeeding women, (3) Prevention strategies for pregnant and breastfeeding women, and (4) Structural enablers to ensure that all children are linked to care and are virally suppressed.

We have also made a good progress in sustaining the National Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination programme as we will be celebrating 10

years in 2024. This is the path that will be strengthened by HPV screening for all eligible women and treating all those diagnosed with pre-cancer or cervical cancer. We are calling upon all women present here today to get screened for Cervical Cancer.

I will not do justice if I finish without touching on two other important challenges we are facing as a country. (1) Women are still accessing illegal abortion; I personally led the campaign across all nine provinces of the country to raise awareness about the challenges of illegal abortion. Please find the safe abortion services within the health care system.

(2) The number of young girls between the ages 10-14 who deliver babies is increasing. This is really unacceptable. Let us take the whole society approach to combat this upcoming pandemic. We are working with health workers to be receptive to these young people and provide them with the services that they need in a youth friendly manner. To date we have over 1 800 Youth Zones in the country, and 165 are in Free State, please utilise them and provide feedback.

As we are approaching festive season, it is proper to step back and zoom in on the pandemic that is still going on in the country, HIV and AIDS and other STIs.

We haven't reached the 95-95-95 HIV cascade targets (through public and private health sectors) as at the end of August 2023 we are at 95-78-92. South Africa needs to put an additional estimated 1,2 million patients on treatment. we must find and treat 594, 263 women and 614, 597 men living with HIV.

We remain alert that basic prevention strategies should continue to include Pre-exposure prophylaxis Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) male and female condoms and compatible water-based lubricant. Respond to underlying aggravating factors such as gender-based violence and femicide (GBV and F). We have launched the 5th generation National Strategic Plan (2023-2028), which will lead us to the 2030 agenda. We need to ensure that we work together in a multi-sectoral manner to reach all the 4 goals of the National Strategic Plan 2023-2028. We need to continue to fight the quadruple burden of diseases that we face, as well as achieve the target of reduction of incidence in youth.

It is thus my pleasure to launch the theme of this year's World AIDS Day, which is "**LET COMMUNITIES LEAD,**" This theme is aligned to the SANAC Civil Society Forum Motto, 'Communities Matter' and it benefits the country's aspirations to strengthen communities to take charge. The World AIDS Day 2023 will be in KwaZulu-Natal, King Cetshwayo District, Mhlathuze Municipality on the 1st of December 2023.

I would like to acknowledge the Rotarians and all our partners for the continued support. Please continue to engage with all the services points for your health assessments, vaccinations, and screening services.

I THANK YOU