



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE MINISTER OF HEALTH: DR P A MOTSOALEDI, MP AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA SUB-REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH INTERCOUNTRY WORKSHOP IN PREPARATION FOR THE 7<sup>TH</sup> GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH MINISTERIAL SUMMIT.**

**VENUE: EMPERORS PALACE HOTEL, GAUTENG PROVINCE.**

**DATE: 27 MAY 2026**

Programme Directors;

Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi, World Health Organization South Africa Country Office;

Dr Devora Kerstal, Director: Mental Health and NCDs, WHO Head Quarters, Geneva;

Ms Beryl Naicker, Secretary of State, Mental Health Care, Seychelles;

Senior Managers from Government Departments

Dr Paul Spencer, Wellcome Trust;

Moderators, Speakers, Panellists and Participants from South Africa and Abroad

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to South Africa and to deliver this address for this important East and Southern Africa Sub-Regional Mental Health Inter-country Workshop, convened in preparation for the 7th Global Mental Health Ministerial Summit that will take place in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2027.

I express my sincere appreciation to the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa, the Wellcome Trust and all partners involved in organising this workshop. I also extend a warm welcome to delegates from across the region who have travelled to South Africa to contribute their expertise and experience to this important dialogue.

Your participation reflects a shared commitment to advancing mental health and wellbeing for the people of Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is increasing global recognition that mental health is fundamental to health, development and human wellbeing. Mental health conditions contribute substantially to the burden of disease and are closely linked to many of the health challenges that continue to affect our populations. These include communicable diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis, non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, as well as maternal and child health conditions, violence and injuries.

The evidence is clear: when mental health needs are neglected, health outcomes worsen, treatment adherence declines, disability increases and

families and communities suffer. This is why the World Health Organization has consistently reminded us that there is no health without mental health.

Across the world, mental health has emerged as one of the most pressing public health challenges of our time. Growing social and economic pressures, man-made conflict, disasters, displacement, substance use disorders, chronic disease and persistent inequalities continue to increase the demand for mental health services. At the same time, many countries continue to face shortages of skilled personnel, inadequate financing and limited access to quality mental health care.

The African region faces many of these challenges. We are home to the world's youngest populations and many communities on the African continent continue to experience poverty, unemployment and inequality. These realities increase vulnerability to mental ill-health and place additional pressure on already stretched health systems.

At the same time, Africa possesses important strengths. Our communities are characterised by resilience, social cohesion and strong family support structures. These assets provide a valuable foundation upon which we can build effective and culturally responsive mental health services. We must continue to draw on these strengths while investing in evidence-based interventions that promote prevention, early identification, treatment and rehabilitation.

I was particularly encouraged to learn that this workshop includes a dedicated focus on perinatal mental health. Mental health conditions during pregnancy and after childbirth remain an important yet often overlooked public health challenge. Addressing these needs is critical not only for mothers but also for the health and development of children and families.

Distinguished delegates, the upcoming Global Mental Health Ministerial Summit to be held in Kigali in 2027, presents a unique opportunity for Africa to shape the global mental health agenda. I would therefore like to congratulate Rwanda for accepting the responsibility of hosting this important event. The 2027 Summit will be the first Global Mental Health Ministerial Summit to be held on African soil, and this represents a significant milestone for our continent.

We must use this opportunity to ensure that African experiences, innovations and priorities are reflected in global discussions and commitments. Our region has unique challenges, but it also has valuable lessons to share regarding community-based care, integration of services and innovative approaches to delivering health care in resource-constrained environments.

This workshop provides an important platform for countries to reflect on progress, identify common priorities and develop a shared regional voice ahead of the Summit. It is also an opportunity to strengthen collaboration and mutual learning among Member States.

In South Africa, mental health continues to receive attention at the highest levels of our health system and remains a standing agenda item of the National Health Council, where national and provincial health leaders meet regularly to address priorities affecting the health of our people. While we acknowledge the progress that has been made and we are equally aware that much work remains. Like many countries represented here today, South Africa continues to face challenges relating to human resources, infrastructure, financing and equitable access to services. These challenges require innovation, collaboration and sustained commitment.

South Africa remains committed to strengthening mental health services as an integral component of universal health coverage through primary health care. Our policies and legislation promote the integration of mental health services within general health care services at community, primary health care facility and hospital levels. This approach supports person-centred care, improves access to services and contributes to reducing stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness.

We also recognise the importance of safeguarding the rights and dignity of mental health care users and continue to strengthen mechanisms that promote accountability, oversight and protection of human rights within mental health services.

The WHO Regional Framework for Africa adopted in 2022 provides valuable guidance for Member States as we work towards strengthening mental health systems and implementing the Comprehensive Mental Health Action

Plan 2013–2030. The framework emphasises the importance of strong governance, integrated services at primary health care and community level, robust information systems and sustainable financing for mental health.

These priorities remain highly relevant if we are to expand access to quality, rights-based mental health services for all our populations.

I am also pleased that some delegates will have an opportunity to visit selected facilities during the course of this workshop. Such visits provide valuable opportunities for mutual learning. They allow us to showcase areas of progress while also identifying gaps and opportunities for improvement. We learn not only from our successes, but also from our challenges.

In conclusion, this workshop comes at an important moment for mental health in Africa. The growing burden of mental health conditions requires a collective response that is informed by evidence, guided by human rights and supported by strong political commitment.

As we prepare for the Global Mental Health Ministerial Summit in Kigali, let us use this gathering to strengthen partnerships, share practical solutions and define clear priorities that will improve the lives of millions of people across our continent.

The success of this workshop will ultimately be measured not by the quality of our discussions alone, but by the actions we take when we return to our respective countries.

To all delegates, I wish you productive deliberations and a successful workshop. To our international guests, I hope you enjoy your stay in South Africa and experience the warmth and hospitality for which our country is known.

I thank you.