

Keynote Address by Limpopo Premier Dr Phophi Ramathuba at the Rural Health Matters Outreach Programme 5th Anniversary Celebration

Programme Director,
MEC for Health, Ms Dieketseng Mashego,
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Vhembe District Executive Mayor, Cllr Freda Nkondo,
Mayor of Makhado Municipality, Cllr Dorcus Mmboyi,
Elim Hospital CEO, Mr Pfuluwani Timothy Matodzi,
Healthcare Professionals,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ndi matsheloni, Avuxeni, Thobela, Good morning, Goeie môre,

This morning, as I stand before you, my heart is filled with gratitude, admiration, and renewed conviction in the noble profession of healthcare. There is a well-known saying that “to serve humanity is to serve God.” Over the past five years, the Rural Health Matters Outreach Programme has been a living testimony of that truth.

What began as a dream to bring specialised healthcare closer to our people in rural communities has grown into a beacon of hope, touching lives and restoring dignity to thousands. Today, as we mark the fifth anniversary of this remarkable programme, I am humbled to say: you, our doctors, nurses, specialists, porters, cleaners, and every hand that contributed, you are the true heroes of this story.

When this programme was launched in 2020, we knew it would require not only resources but above all, unity, passion, and dedication from our healthcare professionals.

And indeed, you have exceeded all expectations. Over the years, you have taken the white coat beyond the hospital walls into villages and rural clinics, ensuring that even the most vulnerable among us do not feel forgotten.

You have embraced the spirit of Ubuntu, proving that healthcare is not just about curing diseases, but about restoring hope, empowering communities, and giving every citizen a fair chance at a healthier, longer life.

This year, in celebration of Women's Month, the programme once again reminded us of why it exists. We deliberately focused on conditions that most affect women, acknowledging both their resilience and their unique health challenges. Our teams worked tirelessly across different hospitals, and the results speak volumes.

In the discipline of Urogynaecology, 17 women received life-changing interventions—11 at Elim and 6 at Pietersburg. In Gynae Oncology, 11 women at Tshilidzini Hospital received specialised surgeries, while 60 women at Pietersburg underwent LLETZ procedures to prevent cervical cancer. At Mankweng, three women underwent breast reduction surgeries that not only restored their health but also gave them new confidence. Altogether, 91 operations were performed specifically in celebration of Women's Month.

But that was not all. As part of the build-up to this anniversary, we recorded 55 orthopaedic surgeries—41 at Tshilidzini and 14 at Elim—transforming the lives of those who had lost mobility and independence. At Elim Hospital,

56 ophthalmology cases were attended to, restoring sight and with it, restoring hope. Malamulele Hospital, on its part, conducted 35 general surgeries that relieved suffering and saved lives. This brought the total number of operations in the build-up to 146.

Ladies and gentlemen, when you put together the 91 cases dedicated to Women's Month and the 146 done in the build-up, we are standing here today celebrating a grand total of 237 operations. Two hundred and thirty-seven lives touched. Two hundred and thirty-seven families given new joy. Two hundred and thirty-seven reasons for us to stand proud as Limpopo. And the best part is that this is not the end. The programme will continue until the 25th of August, meaning many more lives will still be changed for the better.

What stands out to me in all of this is not just the numbers, impressive as they are, but the spirit of teamwork and selflessness that made this possible. From the specialist surgeon in the theatre to the nurse by the bedside, from the porter who ensures patients are moved safely, to the cleaner who maintains sterile spaces—all of you are the unseen pillars upon which these successes stand. The unity and dedication you displayed throughout this outreach remind us that when healthcare professionals come together with one purpose, no challenge is too big, and no community is too far.

I want to take this opportunity to salute each one of you. Thank you for your sacrifices. Thank you for the long hours, the sleepless nights, and for putting the well-being of our people above your comfort. Thank you for choosing to serve in rural areas where the need is greatest, even when it means working under pressure with limited resources. You are the embodiment of true patriotism.

As a government, we are committed to ensuring that the legacy of Rural Health Matters does not stop here. We will continue to support this initiative, expand its reach, and invest in the human resources and infrastructure needed to make healthcare more accessible. But the heart of this programme will always be you—the professionals who wear the uniform of care, who take oaths to serve, and who deliver with compassion.

Colleagues, as we celebrate five years of Rural Health Matters, we are proud to report to you that 11, 741 operations have been conducted to date. Let us recommit ourselves to the next five, ten, and even twenty years. Let us continue to inspire the next generation of healthcare professionals to carry this torch.

Let us keep reminding ourselves that the face of the patient we serve could easily be our mother, our child, or our neighbour. That human connection is what keeps this programme alive.

In closing, allow me once again to say: thank you. Thank you for proving that when we work together with one vision, lives are transformed. Thank you for showing us that rural does not mean forgotten, but rather, it means community, compassion, and resilience. Thank you for giving our people hope.

May the Rural Health Matters Outreach Programme continue to grow, continue to heal, and continue to remind us all that healthcare is not just a service, but a calling.

I thank you.