

RESPONSE BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA ON HIV/AIDS, TB AND STIs WORLD AIDS DAY COMMEMORATION

01 DECEMBER 2025

Programme Director, thank you for the opportunity. Allow me to extend a truly warm and heartfelt welcome to all our distinguished guests gathered here in the Sekhukhune District for this solemn and significant World AIDS Day Commemoration.

Today we are honoured by the presence of the Chairperson of the South African National AIDS Council, our Honourable Deputy President, His Excellency Mr Paul Mashatile. Deputy President, your leadership, your consistency, and your unwavering commitment to the HIV response continue to inspire us as a province and propel us toward deeper accountability and action.

To our civil society formations, the backbone of community health and community voice, we acknowledge your tireless work, often under challenging circumstances. Your presence reminds us that the true fight against HIV, TB and STIs is carried not only in clinics and laboratories, but in homes, villages, schools, prisons, churches and mines.

Programme Director, this year we commemorate the World AIDS Day under the theme: Renewed Efforts and Sustainable Commitments to End AIDS "This theme is both a call to action and a reflection of the ongoing challenges in our health system that undermine the national goal of reaching the 1.1 million more people back to treatment.

Today is not merely a commemoration, but It is a renewal of a collective promise to our people. As former President Nelson Mandela once said: "It is in your hands to create a better world for all who live in it." On this World AIDS Day, we reaffirm that the power to end AIDS by 2030 rests in our united hands.

As the Provincial Government, we committed to closing the HIV treatment gap of 180 975 by December 2025. While we have not fully reached this target, we must acknowledge the meaningful improvements recorded between October 2024 and October 2025.

Under the global 95-95-95 targets:

On the first 95, we reached 93% – close, but not enough.

On the second 95, we achieved 80%, which is our biggest area of concern.

On the third 95, we performed strongly at 97%, indicating that once people are on treatment, our systems do support them well. When it comes to treatment outcomes, we are encouraged by the continued improvement in treatment outcomes on both adults and children:

For Adults

Adult retention in care improved from 83.9% (Dec 2024) to 87.6% (Sept 2025).
Adult viral load suppression rose from 76.6% to 83.9% during the same period.

When it comes to children, Here, Limpopo shines brightly:
We reached 95% child retention in care — up from 88.9%, a remarkable improvement of 6.1%.
Child viral load suppression improved dramatically from 52.8% to 91% — a 38.2% improvement.

When broken by district child retention in care rates are as follows:
Sekhukhune leads with 98% child retention.
Waterberg follows at 95.6%,
Vhembe at 95.4%,
Mopani at 92.7
Capricorn at 93.8.

On viral load suppression for children on ART:
Waterberg achieved 100%,
Vhembe 93.3%,
Sekhukhune 91.7%.
Mopani 83.9
Capricorn 86.2

These achievements show what is possible when our systems work, when our people are supported, and when our partnerships are strong.

Programme Director, the fight against HIV cannot be won by the health sector alone. It demands the unified effort of government, business, traditional leadership, labour, civil society, and communities.

Hence every local and district municipalities should have effective AIDS Councils to propel the work that was started by the South African National AIDS Council.

From October to November 2025, multisectoral build-up activities reached over 25 000 people across all districts, focusing on the Cheka Impilo intervention to close the treatment gap.

However, the gap remains significant. We are still working tirelessly to reach over 96 000 people living with HIV who are not yet fully in care.

I must commend our districts for their relentless efforts:
Waterberg District re-engaged 13 578 clients by October 2025 – a 60% achievement.
Sekhukhune District, our host today, re-engaged 18 198 clients – a 58% improvement.

In Vhembe District, a total of 18 480 individuals have been re-engaged into care, reflecting 44% progress toward closing the treatment gap.

In Mopani District, 18 815 individuals have been reached, marking 39% achievement.

Capricorn District has re-engaged 15 256 individuals, representing 41% progress.

While we acknowledge and appreciate these efforts, it is clear that more must be done. We therefore call all our districts to fully utilise the strategies and guidance provided by the Department of Health.

Only through consistent implementation, strengthened community outreach, and intensified case-finding, can we move closer to the ultimate goal of reaching 100% re-engagement and treatment coverage.

Programme Director, our intensified re-engagement campaigns, our provincial reach has improved significantly from 60 843 (34%) in July 2025 to 84 327 (47%) in October 2025.

These numbers are more than statistics. They represent families restored. Futures reclaimed. Lives saved.

We commend partners such as Mahlasedi Health, the mining sector, and particularly Glencore, whose campaign at Sefateng Mine reached 1 225 mine workers in just three days. This is the kind of collaboration we seek to replicate across all mining operations in the province.

Our civil society partners continue to play an indispensable role, even amidst the pain of funding cuts. We stand with you. We hear your concerns. And we commit to advocating for greater support to sustain the community-led response.

Colleagues, our fight against HIV cannot be separated from the fight against gender-based violence.

In the 2024/2025 financial year alone:

3 676 new sexual offence cases were attended to in our health facilities.

2 869 survivors received Post-Exposure Prophylaxis.

Behind these numbers are women, children, and men who have suffered deeply. We reaffirm our partnership with the Department of Health, SAPS, and the Judiciary to ensure that survivors receive timely care and perpetrators face the full might of the law.

Programme Director, as Limpopo, we refuse to lose the gains we have made. We have made a call to the District and Local AIDS Councils to strengthen their oversight of the multisectoral response and intensify case-finding, re-engagement, and TB screening so

that Limpopo reaches the 95-95-95 target not as a statistical exercise, but as a moral obligation to our people.

Deputy President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, let us leave here inspired, united, and determined. Ending AIDS by 2030 is possible, but only if we walk this journey together.

I thank you.