

WELCOME REMARKS BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE LIMPOPO  
PROVINCIAL AIDS COUNCIL MEETING AT THE RANCH RESORT, POLOKWANE

17 JUNE 2026

Members of the Limpopo Provincial AIDS Council, Members of the Executive Council,  
Executive Mayors and the Executive Mayor of Polokwane Municipality, SALGA  
Representatives,  
Director-General,  
Traditional Leaders,  
Faith-Based Leaders,  
Private Sector Representatives,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ndi Matsheloni, Thobela, Avuxeni, Good Morning, Goeie More.

Today, we gather here as custodians of a journey that has transformed lives and restored hope. We meet at a time when the story of South Africa's response to HIV and AIDS stands as a testament to what is possible when government, communities, civil society, traditional leaders, faith-based organisations and the private sector unite behind a common purpose.

We have travelled a long road from fear to hope, from stigma to acceptance, and from despair to the promise of an AIDS-free generation. While we celebrate the progress we have made, we are equally reminded that our journey is not yet complete.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the first meeting of the Limpopo Provincial AIDS Council in the 2026/27 financial year. This session provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our fourth-quarter performance, assess the progress we have made, identify challenges and strengthen our collective response to HIV, TB and related social challenges affecting our communities.

As we commemorate Youth Month, we are reminded that the future of our province rests in the hands of young people. We therefore call upon leaders in this house to encourage our youth to take charge of their health and wellbeing by rejecting substance abuse, gender-based violence and behaviours that expose them to HIV infection and unintended pregnancies. We must empower our young people with information, opportunities and support systems that enable them to make informed decisions about their lives.

We welcome the recent launch by President Cyril Ramaphosa of the rollout of Lenacapavir, a groundbreaking injectable PrEP that has the potential to significantly strengthen HIV prevention efforts. As Limpopo prepares for the rollout in the coming financial year, we encourage all those currently using Oral PrEP to continue protecting themselves through the services already available in our health facilities.

While we are encouraged by the decline in child and adolescent pregnancies, we remain convinced that even one child pregnancy is one too many. We must continue to confront the scourge of child abuse, transactional sex and exploitation of young girls. Every child deserves the opportunity to remain in school, pursue their dreams and reach their full potential. We commend the Department of Social Development for the ongoing research into the drivers of teenage pregnancy, which will assist us in designing more targeted and effective interventions.

While we have made significant progress in the fight against HIV as a province, the reality is that our performance against the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets remains a cause for concern. Currently, 93% of people living with HIV know their status, against a target of 95%. Only 81% of those diagnosed are on treatment, well below the target of 95%, while 97% of those on treatment are virally suppressed. Although we have reached the first 95 among adult women, the data shows that men continue to lag behind in accessing HIV testing services. More concerning is that our performance has remained largely unchanged between October 2025 and March 2026.

This stagnation demands serious reflection. We must honestly ask ourselves why we are not making the progress required to achieve our targets. What barriers remain? What innovations are needed? How do we strengthen accountability and community mobilisation? These are the questions that must guide our discussions today.

As we deliberate, let us remember that statistics represent real people, real families and real communities. Behind every percentage point lies a life that can be saved, a child that can be protected and a future that can be secured.

I therefore call upon every member of the Limpopo Provincial AIDS Council, every sector represented here today, and every social partner to recommit themselves to the goal of ending HIV and TB as public health threats by 2030. Time is no longer on our side. The targets before us require urgency, innovation, stronger partnerships and unwavering commitment.

Let us leave this meeting with renewed determination, practical solutions and a shared resolve to ensure that Limpopo reaches the 95-95-95 targets and delivers a healthier future for all our people.

I thank you.