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PREMIER NDLOVU URGES MEN IN MPUMALANGA TO USE HEALTH FACILITIES FOR HIV TESTING THAN USING THEIR PARTNERS.

Mpumalanga Premier, Mr Mandla Ndlovu has urged men in the province to refrain from using their partners' HIV status to diagnose themselves. Ndlovu was addressing a meeting of the Mpumalanga Provincial Aids Council (MPAC) to assess progress in the implementation of Provincial Implementation Plan (PIP) for HIV, TB and STIs.

The Premier said men are encouraged to personally test and know their status, to intensify community HIV testing. "We need to encourage men to develop a health seeking lifestyle. We must therefore assure them that our health facilities and programs are also men-friendly. Every member of the community is a leader in his own or her own right. It is against this background that no one must be left out in the fight against HIV, TB and STIs, to eradicate this epidemic," he explained.

The Premier expressed the Mpumalanga government's commitment to working closely with all stakeholders to wage a war against the spread of HIV and AIDS, TB and STIs. This includes support for municipalities to develop multi-sectoral implementation plans to eradicate the endemics.

"As a government, it is of great importance that we involve people living with HIV and TB in our quest to mitigate stigma, encourage increase uptake of HIV services and in supporting the reduction of discrimination strategies. These people are our ambassadors and soldiers. They are at the forefront of this war. We dare not leave them behind," said Premier Ndlovu.

The country's leading health research institution, the Human Science Research Council (HSRC), has revealed a high level of new HIV infections amongst adolescent girls and young women aged between 15 – 24. These findings were raised in the meeting as a growing concern which requires urgent attention and action. According to Premier Ndlovu this suggests that the youth is not spared in HIV infections, adding that they are more at risk of contracting the endemic because of the social and behavioral factors.

"South Africa has made significant strides in responding to the epidemics, but we need to accelerate our efforts in order to achieve the global targets set by the UNAIDS, of 95-95-95, to end these health threats by the year 2030. These include viral suppression of communities and ensuring that patients stick to the ARVs and TB treatment programmes. Currently our three districts in the province are part of the 27 HIV high burden districts in the country," Ndlovu expatiated.

Speaking on behalf of the civil society, MPAC Co-Chairperson Ms Sonto Nkosi urged government institutions to utilize the conditional donations from the donors solely for the fight against HIV and TB. She said failure to spend funds would impact negatively on the fight against HIV and TB.

Ms Nkosi further urged the government to find and provide support to the missing patients who have since absconded from taking their treatments. "We appreciate the Premier's commitment to robustly work hard in the fight against HIV and TB," said Ms Nkosi.

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