

# **SPEAKING NOTES OF THE MEC FOR HEALTH: HON SASEKANI MANZINI TO COMMEMORATE WORLD AIDS DAY: MATSULU**

01 December 2023 , Friday

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guest, and fellow citizens.

Today, we gather here to mark an important occasion, worlds AIDS Day. It is a day dedicated to raising awareness about one of the greatest challenges of our time – the HIV/AIDS pandemic. On this day, we come together to remember those we have lost, honour those living with HIV/AIDS, and renew our commitment to the fight against this devastating disease. We are commemorating the world AIDS Day today under the theme “Let communities lead.”

Since the discovery of HIV/AIDS several decades ago, it has claimed millions of lives and caused immeasurable suffering. It has affected individuals, families, and communities around the world, irrespective of age, gender, race, or social status. But today, we stand united in our determination to comfort this global health crisis and work towards a future free from the burden of HIV/AIDS.

World AIDS Day serves as a reminder that together as communities we can overcome this disease. As Mpumalanga Province we rated the second province after KZN to ensure that 95% of our people living with HIV, knows their status. As a province we are doing well in taking HIV/AIDS tests, our records show that in the second quarter of this financial year we have tested more than 390 000 patients for HIV in our facilities.

HIV tests can detect the presence of the virus in the body even before symptoms appear. Early diagnosis allows for timely medical intervention, which can greatly improve health outcomes and quality of life for individuals living with HIV. It is

important to know your status because it prevents the transmission of the virus and provides the individual with an opportunity to take a protective step such as practicing safer sex, using condoms, or considering pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Additionally, HIV testing is an essential component of prevention strategies “Test and Treat” and “Treatment as Prevention” which aim to identify and treat HIV-positive individuals to reduce community transmission.

Program director, despite that an estimated 718 449 people in the province have taken a HIV test and therefore know their status, we are not ignorant to the fact that some are still afraid or ignorant to do the HIV testing. We encourage everyone to know his or her HIV status. We are also aware that majority of our male party don't go to our facilities for testing but relies on their female counterpart for their status.

Program Director, the aim is to have a health system that raises the life expectancy of South Africans to at least 70 years. It would include dealing proactively with HIV and reducing injury, accidents, violence, and substance abuse. According to the StatSA 2022 midterm population estimates, South African life expectancy has increased from 55 in 2001 to 57 in 2011 and now 65.5 years. We will continue with integrated efforts to achieve the targets for 70 years by 2030.

We have strengthened our efforts to scale up ART services, to date 596 996 people living with HIV are receiving antiretroviral treatment in this province. This figure represents 83% of people who know their HIV status and are getting treatment. This means that people found to be HIV positive are now initiated on ART treatment immediately after they are diagnosed with HIV.

To make things easy for those on treatment we have improved our services by placing ART recipients on different collection programs which varies from two months to six months. This collection program allows the patient to collect medicine either in our facilities or local pharmacies.

Several scientific studies have shown that male circumcision can significantly reduce the risk of heterosexual transmission of HIV. Circumcision reduces the susceptibility of men to acquire HIV during intercourse by up to 60%. About 40 00 men in our province have done circumcision during this year. It is important to note that circumcision is not a standalone prevention method and should be combined with other preventive measures, such as condom use and safe sexual practice.

Education and awareness play a crucial role in our fight against HIV/AIDS. It is imperative that we continue to disseminate accurate information about transmission, prevention, and treatment, dispelling misconceptions and promoting understanding. By promoting comprehensive sex education, we empower young people with the knowledge and tools they need to protect themselves and make informed choices.

Program Director, what is equally important is the need to combat the stigma and discrimination that still surrounds HIV/AIDS. These attitudes not only hinder individuals from seeking testing and treatment but also perpetuate a culture of silence and shame. We must foster an environment of compassion, empathy, and acceptance, ensuring that those living with HIV/AIDS are treated with dignity and respect.

On this day, let us also recognize the incredible resilience and strength of those living with HIV/AIDS. They are not defined by their infection but by their courage, determination, and unwavering spirit. We must support them in their journey, ensuring that they have access to quality healthcare, social support systems and opportunities to thrive.

In conclusion, World Aids Day serves as a reminder of our shared responsibility to combat HIV/AIDS. It is a day to reflect on the progress made and the challenges that lie ahead. Let us stand together in solidarity, raising our voices. And taking concrete steps to end the HIV/AIDS pandemic once and for all. Together, we can achieve a

future where no one lives in fear of HIV/AIDS, and where everyone can enjoy good health dignity, and equality.

Thank you.