



WE CAN BEST HONOUR THE YOUTH OF 1976 BY LOOKING AFTER OUR HEALTH

MS NOMAGUGU SIMELANE
MEC FOR HEALTH

One of the most admirable, humbling and over-arching features of the spirit of the youth of 1976 was their unshakeable resolve to end oppression and injustice, and transform South African life for the better.

They were agitating to put a stop to the brutality and subjugation visited by the Apartheid State on innocent citizens, and bring about a free and just society, where human rights would be enshrined and upheld for all. Despite the harshness of the times, these young people stayed true to their generational task and never wavered. In the process, many lives were irrevocably changed. Families were torn apart, as scores of people were jailed, others were forced into exile, and many paid the ultimate price and lost their very lives, in pursuit of the democracy and freedom that we enjoy today.

Although South Africa is not exactly a nirvana today, and a lot still needs to change in order to grow the economy and help citizens reach their full potential, it is nevertheless a markedly better place to live. For us in the healthcare sector, it is particularly imperative that the struggles of the youth of 1976 and many generations before and after it, should never be in vain.

After all, of what use is a people's freedom if they neglect something as essential and fundamental as their own health and wellbeing. This is precisely what concerns us. One of the most unfortunate and still-entrenched legacies of the Apartheid system was the resultant low levels of health literacy, associated poor lifestyle choices, as well as a generally "hospicentric" approach when it comes to beliefs and choices about individuals' personal health. This "hospicentricity" manifests itself in such a way that the majority of our country's health problems are largely dealt with at hospital level, when people have already presented with serious complications.

Sadly, this vicious cycle is passed on from generation to generation and results in many young people dying prematurely or succumbing to various social ills that are actually avoidable, such as drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, violence and death due to trauma and injury. This is precisely why we are calling on the young people of KwaZulu-Natal to change their ways and make their freedom count.

As a Department, we have a plethora of health services that are aimed at the youth, which we are inviting young people to make use of. We are continuing to train our healthcare workers

and transforming our systems to be non-judgemental and more welcoming to young people who seek healthcare services, including family planning, treatment for Sexually Transmitted Infections and Choice of Termination of Pregnancy;

FREE MALE AND FEMALE CONDOMS, AND OTHER CONTRACEPTIVES:

Young people are liberty to access a number of family planning methods from our clinics, Community Health Centres and Hospitals, including male and female condoms. A wide range of female contraceptives are also on offer.

ASSISTANCE WITH THE FACILITATION OF PUTTING UP UNWANTED CHILDREN FOR ADOPTION:

Before going ahead with Choice of Termination of Pregnancy (CTOP), pregnant women are offered the choice to put up their babies for adoption once they are born. Our healthcare professionals are able to engage with social workers and facilitate assistance in this regard.

CHOICE OF TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY:

As mandated by the Constitution of South Africa, the Department provides legal and safe Choice of Termination of Pregnancy services to qualifying mothers who do not wish to keep their babies.

FREE MEDICAL MALE CIRCUMCISION (MMC):

MMC reduces is highly recommended, as it reduces the chances of men getting infected by the HIV by 60%. It also reduces the transference of the Herpes type 2 virus, as well as minimises the chances of cancer of the cervix in women. It also makes the penis is odour-free and improves general hygiene.

FREE PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PREP):

PrEP is an extremely effective HIV prevention method. It is combination of anti-HIV medication that keeps HIV-negative people from getting HIV. It is important to note that PrEP only protects against HIV infection, not against pregnancy or other sexually transmitted infections. It is available and accessible from all primary health care facilities and hospitals in the Province.

ASSISTANCE WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES:

The Department has systems and protocols in place to screen and assess patients with

substance abuse and/or mental healthcare challenges, and facilitate placement for them at appropriate levels of care. The Department also provides counselling services for young people dealing with depression, suicide, anxiety and other social disorders.

ADDRESSING THE HEALTH NEEDS OF THE LGBTQI+ COMMUNITY:

We are in the process of establishing our own LGBTQI+ friendly clinics, at eThekweni and at Umgungundlovu, as a start, before rolling them out to other districts. We will be training staff at these clinics on how to make members of the LGBTQI+ community feel welcome; and how to help them gain better access to healthcare services. We will soon be providing a range of assistive sexual health devices, such as lubricants, dental dams and finger cots-all of which are aimed at the safety of the LGBTQI+ community.

YOUTH-FRIENDLY HEALTH ZONES:

We will soon be launching Youth-Friendly Zones at our clinics. These zones will be led by young people, and will provide a platform for discussions on a variety of health topics. They will also help improve access for young people who need healthcare. We will be launching them at local municipalities, before being expanding the programme to districts across the Province.

Young people are the future. As a progressive and forward-thinking Government, we will never tire of coming up with innovative ways to keep young people healthy, and to help them reach their potential. The ball is in their court to make use of these services and take better care of themselves.

It's the least we can do to honour the memory of the youth of 1976.

