

MEC Dhlomo teams up with Bruce Fordyce to launch second township park run at Madadeni as part of promoting healthy lifestyles

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KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo is determined to continue reducing the number of people who get sick too easily, and die unnecessarily due to lack of regular physical exercise. In a bid to accelerate the Department's healthy lifestyles programme, MEC Dhlomo has teamed up with athletics legend Bruce Fordyce to launch the second township Park Run in the province, at Madadeni - under Amajuba District – where the MEC is the political champion. This comes almost exactly a year after MEC Dhlomo launched the successful KwaMashu Park Run on 14 January 2017. During the Schools Functionality Programme earlier this week, the lack of recreational facilities was flagged as a concern. MEC Dhlomo identified the Phelandaba Sportsfield at Madadeni as the ideal location for the new Park Run, which will start soon.

Park runs are 5km running events that take place every Saturday morning in fourteen countries across five continents. They are run by volunteers, and participation is free of charge. The concept of Park Run is the brainchild of a London-based South African, Paul Sinton-Hewitt, who is a friend of Bruce Fordyce.

MEC Dhlomo said: "The idea of Park Run ties in very well with our healthy lifestyle programme, which is a way of living that lowers the risk of being seriously ill or dying early. Not all diseases are preventable, but a large proportion of deaths, particularly those from coronary heart disease and lung cancer, can be avoided. Scientific studies have identified certain types of behaviour that contribute to the development of non-communicable diseases and early death. Health is not just about avoiding disease. It is also about physical, mental and social wellbeing. When a healthy lifestyle is adopted, a more positive role model is provided for other people in the family, particularly children. If we can adopt a culture of healthy lifestyles can go a long way to improve our health outcomes."

KwaZulu-Natal, like other provinces, is buckling under a quadruple burden of diseases made up of HIV, AIDS and TB; the high rates of maternal and child mortality (often due to teenage pregnancy); non-communicable diseases (such as cancer, diabetes, obesity, hypertension) and violence and injuries.

Factors that contribute to this situation include the sedentary lifestyles that many people lead; poor health choices that they make, such as having unprotected sex, engaging in substance abuse; and unhealthy dietary habits.

"We encourage people to take charge of their own health and be aware of the warning signs pointing to possible health risks. While the Department can provide preventative health care, it is ultimately the people who must embrace the measures introduced," MEC Dhlomo said.

According to Fordyce, Park Run is one of the fastest growing sporting activities in the country, and is already giving other sporting codes stiff competition.

Explaining how he brought the concept to South Africa, Fordyce said: "Paul and I are old friends. I went over to run London Marathon in 2011, and Paul persuaded me to do a park run the day before. I saw the magic. And I said to him, 'we have to start this in South Africa'. We started with one park run in Delta Park in Johannesburg. And 26 people came to the first one. Right now, we have 130 park run venues around SA. Last Saturday, 61 000 people ran or walked. Our membership, that means people who've gone at least once, is over three quarters of a million. It is huge, and we are only 6 years old. We started at the end of 2011. I don't even know what we're going to be like when we're a teenager.

“It’s much more about community bonding than it is about a doing a 5km run. It’s a very friendly and warm feeling. People can’t wait to see each other on Saturday morning, share conversation, go for coffee or breakfast afterwards. By the end of February we will have about 800 000 members. By August/September, we’ll be a million. When I look at other sports, I feel sorry for football, rugby and cricket because they’re so small compared to us. Very soon, park run will be a word in English dictionary,” said Fordyce.



KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo Amajuba District Municipality and Mayor Dr Musa Ngubane (left; and extreme right of the photo) with members of the Madadeni Athletics Club. Back row: Vusi Madlala, Steve Mkasi (KZN Health: Legal Services unit), Nomusa Mgaga, Badelisile Kheswa, Siyabonga Nkonde, Dudu Yende and Muzi Buthelezi. Front row: (left) Mdu Gama, and (third from left) Mbongiseni Dlomo



MEC Dhlomo with Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi during the Park Run launched at KwaMashu last year

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