

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the Brentwood Methodist Church Young Men's Guild Health Campaign

3 September 2011

Fellow Christians

It is indeed uplifting to get an invitation from a young men's sector, serious and committed to find means on how to live better, positive, healthy and above it all wanting to know how and what to contribute for the sake of our communities. I am really touched and humbled.

In embracing you for the dedication and commitment to make the lives of our people healthier, I feel led to refer to the Holy Bible, in particular to **Matthew Chapter 5, verse 14:**

'You are the light of the world – like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.'

Program Director, I have to say that it has always been a dream and desire of our Government, both at national as well as at provincial level to partner with our local churches in promoting health within our communities. In this context, it is more soothing to get an invite from young people, and more uplifting if it is young men like yourselves.

We first have to state that the KwaZulu Natal youth constitute 21% of the total South African population. The youth of this Province thus have a pivotal task in the achievement of our Government's vision to tangibly

create conditions that will result in the attainment of 'A long and healthy life for all South Africans'.

Of upper most importance are the findings of the **2002 World Health Report on "Reducing Risks, Promoting Healthy Living,"** which list physical inactivity as the main risk contributing to non-communicable disease (NCD), global morbidity and mortality. This is true for most of our population as more and more people are suffering from high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity. The situation is further aggravated by the failure to adhere to healthy living traits as we still see more people smoking and a large section still thriving on poor diets which are all major risk factors for chronic disease.

In this forum, fellow Christians, we then need to explore ways in which we can alter this situation. We also need to ponder on ways and means in which we can positively contribute on disease awareness / prevention and promotion of healthy behaviour patterns for all the people of KwaZulu-Natal.

Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle

The attainment of a long and healthy life for the people of KwaZulu-Natal will only be achieved if we succeed in preventing the onset of diseases, this through simply encouraging people to lead healthy and active lives. It remains the duty of all to work ensure:

- (i) reduction of alcohol intake and drug abuse,
- (ii) promotion of healthy diets,

- (iii) responsible sexual behaviors; as well as,
- (iv) combating violence in our communities

In the townships where we stay, we have to foster and create communal ways of living by finding creative ways of utilizing existing facilities to encourage people to be involved in physical activity. The Community Halls for instance, could be used as gyming arenas to cater for people at all age categories in a staggered manner, starting with grannies in the morning followed by kindergarten kids and the school children and workers in the late afternoons. Those that are found to be in need of medical attention can then be referred to abo Nompilo and other health care providers.

In the same arena of physical activity, we have to initiate and foster partnerships with the private sector same as it is happening in other cities as demonstrated by their involvement in sporting codes like Beach soccer; Skate Board and BMX games as well as in identified development sport undertakings i.e. taking rugby and cricket sport codes to previously disadvantaged communities. Trainers are always willing to lend a hand.

In this Province we have a mammoth task of dealing with **Teenage Pregnancy** that come as a result of idleness of our youth especially after school hours.

These pregnancies are higher in schools that are located in poorer neighborhoods where there are few or no sport and recreational facilities. It may come as a shock to some of you to learn that just in **2010** here in KwaZulu Natal we had **17 260** learners from **Grades 3-12** , between the

ages of **10-18years** that fell pregnant. What this means is that all these girls were engaged in reckless and unprotected sex. Beside the fact that the majority of them will not return to class, no one knows how many of them have incurred HIV and now going around infecting more people!

As young people prepared to lend a hand, please be informed that the Department of Health in its initiatives of combating the spread of HIV AND AIDS, TB and STI pandemics is guided by the Presidential announcement on the 2009 World AIDS Day. Here the President of the Republic of South Africa, Honorable Jacob Zuma called for all South Africans to know their HIV status in order to access treatment, care and support early. All our health care facilities are geared and ready to offer this function and as youth you can play a role in ensuring that we all get tested.

Fellow compatriots, there is a saying that tells us to count our blessings one by one. This Province is indeed very fortunate to have leaders in the caliber of His Majesty the King as well as the Premier Dr Zweli Mkhize who initiated and are supporting the return of the **Medical Male Circumcision** custom. The good news is that since April 2010 when we started on the programme as of June 2011 we had a total number of 54 773 males that were successfully circumcised. I have to bring it to your attention that more than 95% of these were found to be HIV negative and our task now is to ensure that they remain negative for the rest of their lives. It is our fervent wish to see you being circumcised yourselves and also imploring other youth to do so as a means to curb the rampant spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

Lastly, I need to inform you that the Department of Health will always present itself as an agency for **Employment opportunities** to the youth committed to saving lives.

Please be informed that every year we offer bursaries to students who want to pursue health related studies. Here we target those students whose parents' joint annual income does not exceed **R120 000**. We chose 20 students per District with a proviso that on completion of studies they will go back to serve the communities where they come from. As an MEC, I also have my own discretionary fund that I fundraise for also intended to assist students who present their plight to my Office.

Emergency Basic Life Support

I also need to inform you that before the end of October this year we will be advertising more than **400 Basic Ambulance Assistant** (Basic Life Support) posts. Those amongst you who have this qualification or have relatives who have acquired this course can then ready themselves for this opportunity.