

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the launch of taking Health Services to Taxi Ranks

Greetings,

We first want to thank the leadership in the Taxi Associations: eThekweni Transport Authority, the leadership of the Ethekewini Metro management taxi council (EMMTC), SANTACO and the KZN Department of Transport for the high level of co-operation and support they have given to this initiative aimed at saving and prolonging the lives of both members of the Taxi industry as well as the commuters at large.

I also congratulate all the stakeholders that made the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement between the EThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and the Minibus Taxi Operators on the GO! DURBAN PROJECT a reality and resounding success. This is indeed a key development in establishment of the integrated Rapid Public Transport Network that will bring the City into a new era of socio economic benefits for itself and its citizens.

Our focus on the Taxi Industry is borne out of the fact that South Africa's taxis are a critical and an essential part of the public transport network. They are convenient to the majority of our people as they are readily available for getting commuters around to and from home to work; for shopping and for socialising.

Now our main concern as the Department of Health has been that the main role players here; the DRIVERS, are always on the road or at the taxi ranks and do not find time to visit CLINICS for normal periodical health screenings or at worst scenario, treatment of ailments.

We could also not shy away from the fact that this industry is **male dominated**. *AMADODA AWAYIHAMBI IMITHOLAMPILO!!* Generally, men tend to be reactive rather than proactive in the maintenance and promotion of their own health and we know that at times they do delay care even when they experience symptoms.

With this type of industry, Programme Director, we also understand that general health care facilities are out of reach for the taxi drivers and the community of hawkers as they cannot be able to wait in the long day clinic queues due to the nature of work they do.

But now working together, we want to reaffirm our good motto that says: **men can make a difference** in dealing with the maladies this Province is faced with.

What does the overall health situation in the Province look like?

- KwaZulu-Natal has the highest HIV prevalence rate compared to all the nine Provinces and accounts for 28, 7% of all South Africa's HIV infections.
- KwaZulu-Natal in 2012 reported a total number of 101 037 TB cases which translates to TB incidence of 1090 per 100 000 population. We need to caution that Tuberculosis (TB) is a contagious disease that spreads through the air. When infectious people cough; sneeze; talk or spit, they propel TB germs into the air and a person has only to inhale a small number of these to get infected.
- We also have the scary TB/HIV co infection model which is currently at a staggering 70% rate. This is a form of a lethal

combination with each speeding the other's progress. HIV weakens the immune system and someone who is HIV-positive and infected with TB is many times more likely to become sick with TB than someone infected with TB who is HIV-negative. TB is a leading cause of death among people who are HIV-positive.

- The Sexually Transmitted Infection incidents are currently pitched at 6%, with the common infections experienced at health facilities being the discharge syndromes, especially genital ulcer syndrome
- Our other biggest concern is **the escalating rate of non-communicable diseases**. These include Cardiovascular diseases; Diabetes; Chronic respiratory conditions; Cancer; Mental disorder; Oral diseases; Eye diseases; Kidney disease and Muscular-skeletal conditions which are all largely preventable.
- One last aspect which is relevant for this industry as well is that of violence and injury which we have also identified as another significant contributing factor to the country's burden of disease.

Now, how do we work together to deal with the above and also fulfil the task of ensuring that the vision of ***A Long and Healthy Life for All South Africans*** is realised.

Again we thank the leadership of all the Taxi Associations for being visionary in working with the Department of Health and allowing the Department to come here and introduce the Mobile Clinics that will deal with health problems of all the people who have a relation with this industry.

Taxi ranks are indeed commercial and social centres that offer a **unique opportunity for health promotion to people** who may not easily access the Department of health's services.

Here we are talking about vendors; passengers; consumers; taxi-drivers; taxi-owners and taxi-conductors. Working together with the Taxi Industry, this is what needs to be achieved:

- Provide a comprehensive package of primary health care services such as screening for hypertension diabetes and vision testing in order to promote a preventive approach to health.
- Ensure that everyone here is voluntarily tested for HIV and screened for TB every year.
- Provide platforms for early diagnosis and rapid enrolment onto treatment
- Ensuring that people living with HIV; STIs, TB, diabetes, hypertension and other chronic diseases remain within the healthcare system and adhere to treatment
- Reduce HIV and TB stigma as well as all forms of discrimination
- Ensure that all sexually active males are circumcised for both hygiene as well as means to lessen chances of HIV infection
- Male and female condoms are made available as well as other forms of contraceptives

Taxi owners and taxi drivers as part of the general public are not immune from chronic conditions like hypertension and diabetes that tend to be diagnosed at a very advanced stage. In dealing with the alarming increase rate of these Non-communicable diseases, we elicit support of everyone in addressing the four key factors which are:

- Reducing tobacco smoking
- Reducing harmful alcohol consumption
- Promoting physical activity, and
- Addressing unhealthy diets

The difference we are talking about today is on ensuring that we create **Health Promoting Taxi Ranks** with an objective of:

- Having taxi drivers with positive attitudes towards healthy living
- Seeing to it that taxi drivers become the ambassadors to health messages and feedback
- Taxi ranks becoming avenues where health information about outbreaks of influenza, measles and actions to be taken at household level is disseminated.
- Work-shopping Taxi drivers on basic first aid skills in order to deal with cases of emergency
- Multiplying the number of real men who will join the **Anti-Sugar Daddy Campaign** aimed at combating intergenerational sex.

This partnership will assist in making people understand what's going on with their health and what they can do to improve it.

It will also lead to higher productivity and making this industry more profitable as good health is known to contribute to decreasing absenteeism at the workplace.

Again we are saying thank you for the opportunity granted. We have always regarded **Taxi ranks as priority settings for health**

promotion that can have a positive impact on the community's health.

The KwaZulu Natal Provincial Strategic Plan (PSP) on HIV, TB and STI's (2012- 2016) clearly outlines that efforts to reach zero new HIV infections, zero stigma and zero AIDS- related deaths will only be achieved through explicit commitment to addressing the HIV epidemics among key populations, and this includes the Taxi Industry.

As a Department, working together with the Taxi Industry and the Department of Transport we are committed in seeing this partnership growing and expanding to all the Taxi Ranks in the same way as we have the Truck Stop Clinics across the Province.

Our cooperation bears testimony that indeed South Africa is a much better place to live in now than it has ever been.

I thank you