KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

HEALTH

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA RELEASE:

KZN HEALTH MEC Ms NOMAGUGU SIMELANE URGES ARV DEFAULTERS TO COME BACK TO CARE, AS PROVINCE INTENSIFIES NEW “CLOSE THE GAP” CAMPAIGN

• KZN is on a quest to find 117 000 people and bring them back to treatment by the end of the year

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KWAZULU-NATAL Health MEC Ms Nomagugu Simelane is urging people to get tested and know their HIV status - and she is calling on those who’ve defaulted on treatment to return, so they can benefit fully from these life-saving medicines.

MEC Simelane has also advised individuals on Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) to avoid excessive alcohol consumption in order to stay healthy and consistent with their treatment.

The Province of KwaZulu-Natal has approximately 1.5 million people who are stable on ARVs, but the Department is now on a mission to find thousands more who have stopped treatment for various reasons.

The Province is participating in the newly-launched Close the Gap campaign, which is a collaboration between the National Department of Health and the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC). The campaign aims to reach 1.1 million people across the country who know their HIV status but are not on treatment.

Although more than 200 000 people in KZN are estimated to be lost to treatment, the Province has set a target of finding 117 616 of them by year-end and returning them to care. Speaking on the Department’s KZN Health Chat multimedia programme on Friday, MEC Simelane welcomed the #CloseTheGap campaign, saying:

“We are really determined to bring people back on treatment. As we always say, no one should ever die just because they’ve stopped taking medication that can suppress HIV to the point of being undetectable.

“We know that some people stop taking their ARVs due to treatment fatigue, which we strongly discourage.

“In some ways, we are victims of our own success as a Province. People take their medication until they feel so well that they think they can stop. But they only feel better because of the treatment. So, we urge everyone to stick to their treatment—and for those who’ve stopped, to come back and re-enrol. If we don’t, resistance can develop, making treatment less effective and putting our lives at risk.”

MEC Simelane further cautioned that excessive alcohol use can lead to defaulting on treatment:

“Being a teetotaler doesn’t make you ibhari (a bumpkin) or unfashionable. There is nothing wrong with not drinking. But if you must drink, do so in moderation—especially if you are on ARVs. Drinking too much makes it harder to keep track of time, let alone remember to take your medication. We plead with our compatriots to take care and protect their health.”

While the Department intensifies its Close the Gap efforts, anyone wishing to return to the ART programme is encouraged to visit their local clinic and speak to a healthcare worker.

Tips for Taking Your ARVs on Time:

*Follow Instructions: Take your pills exactly as prescribed.

*Build a Routine: Link it to something that you do every day.

*Use Tools: Set an alarm or use a reminder app on your mobile phone.

*Get Support: Ask a trusted person to help remind you.

*Stay Connected: Keep attending your clinic check-ups as scheduled.

ENDS
Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health