

**Press Release**

**Mobile healthcare services for under-served post-schooling education campuses**

**17 September 2020**

HIGHER HEALTH – the centre devoted to student health, wellness and psychosocial wellbeing, in the post-schooling education sector – today launched 10 fully furnished mobile clinic units that will greatly enhance health services at TVET, CET colleges and universities around the country.

The roving fleet of clinics was unveiled by Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande during a visit to the Zululand District today [subs: 17 September]. The fleet will provide primary healthcare mainly to underserved campuses. This forms part of the HIGHER HEALTH's drive to ensure routine health services are available at the doorsteps of students across South Africa.

HIGHER HEALTH on behalf of the Department of Higher Education and Training provides easy access to primary healthcare to over 250 TVET, 200 CET and 50 disadvantaged and rural university campuses. Considering the pressure induced by COVID-19 on the national healthcare system, the need for routine access to primary and secondary health services at our post-school education and training (PSET) campuses has been heightened.

“This includes COVID screening, testing, contact tracing and other primary health services like sexual reproductive care and mental health counselling and referrals for vulnerable and disadvantaged student and staff community,” says the CEO of HIGHER HEALTH, Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia.

Through this initiative, HIGHER HEALTH seeks to provide early risk detection and case management of health conditions such as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), tuberculosis (TB), unplanned pregnancies, gender-based violence (GBV) and mental illnesses that may occur during tertiary studies. It also has initiatives to address the stigma attached to these conditions which often results in students abandoning their studies.

The intention is also to prevent HIV among the student population by providing convenient access to information and HIV-prevention methods including pre-exposure prophylaxes (PrEP), testing, condoms and lubricants.

The roving clinics will comprise a team of professional nurses, psychologists and healthcare workers and will visit campuses across all nine provinces – priority being institutions with high student populations. Smaller satellite campuses will be served on a bi-weekly and monthly basis.

“This is a great milestone for HIGHER HEALTH and the PSET sector. Historically, providing such services at our campuses has been challenging given that the majority of our TVET and CET colleges and rural universities lacked access to basic healthcare infrastructure.

“In time, we hope that our mobile clinics will form part of the Department of Health's centralised chronic medicines dispensing and distribution network in order to improve the provision of contraceptives, ARVs, diabetes and other chronic medication,” says Dr Ahluwalia.

Currently an operational plan and standard operating procedures are being finalised to ensure alignment between HIGHER HEALTH and national health structures including the Department of Health and the National Health Laboratory Service. Clinic staff have been trained on the respective processes, such as data collection.

The mobile clinic initiative is but one on a long list of actions fast-tracked as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During June the HIGHER HEALTH HealthCheck was launched and since then over five (5) million health checks have been done, on students and staff, across campuses. HealthCheck is a purpose-built daily COVID-19 screening and monitoring tool, secure to use by students and staff entering PSET campuses, each day and transmits data directly into the national COVID-19 tracking and tracing system.

The results were encouraging. The vast majority of results, 3.7 million, fell into the low-risk category. Some 800 000 were in the mid-risk and half that number in the high-risk bracket.

“This is a compliment for the responsible attitude of students and staff towards the COVID-19 pandemic. The only way to defeat this virus is through a social compact: were we all are equally responsible for preventing the spread of the virus to the other,” says Dr Ahluwalia.

“COVID-19 is here to stay for the foreseeable future. It is not seasonal. This means that we must all stay alert to the changing landscape and keep on planning for months and possible years ahead.”

HIGHER HEALTH has also sent out a new protocol for managing cluster outbreaks of COVID-19 in educational institutions. It contains five COVID-19 scenarios which PSET administrators might have to manage. These range from those which occur at an individual level and pose a relatively low risk, to cluster outbreaks of many student and staff becoming positive in a short time-frame that may carry very high risks to the health and wellness of the entire campus staff and student community.

HIGHER HEALTH has also delivered on-site training that has capacitated and developed over 20 000 frontline workers across its sites that, together with daily screenings, tight systems and control points, will mitigate against infection outbreaks and create lower risk.

In addition, 3 200 student volunteers have been trained who are assisting these frontline workers across to help prevent the spread of the virus.

The impact of the virus is not only physical; COVID-19 has clearly shown exacerbated mental health challenges or problems across students and staff that are affected directly and indirectly. In parallel there have been spikes in domestic and sexual violence. This awareness led to yet another breakthrough when HIGHER HEALTH launched a psychosocial toll-free helpline in July to aid the response to mental illness.

To date 500 crisis calls were received and dealt with assisting lives in these difficult times.

Women who experience mental health challenges as a result of gender-based violence (GBV) are three times more likely to have suicidal thoughts or completed suicide. The hotline is a potential life saver.

How to access the HIGHER HEALTH 24-hour student helpline:

- Toll-free call 0800 36 36 36
- SMS 43-33-6
- [higherhealth@sadag.org](mailto:higherhealth@sadag.org)

How to access HealthCheck:

- Dial using USSD line (does not require data): \*134\*832\*2#
- Add to WhatsApp contacts: 0600 11 0 000 and say  
HI: <https://wa.me/27600110000?text=hi>
- Download using the URL for the webform: [healthcheck.higherhealth.ac.za](https://healthcheck.higherhealth.ac.za)

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