

MEDIA STATEMENT
HIV testing among students exceeds target

Pretoria, 23 May 2012 – HIV testing among students and staff at higher education institutions in South Africa is going exceptionally well.

The First Things First HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) campaign launched by the Higher Education sector in February has within three months already exceeded its target to test 35 000 people for HIV.

As at 10 May, 36 772 students and staff had already tested at 20 universities that to date have activated the campaign.

"This is a significant achievement with some four months still to go in the run of the campaign in which universities may undertake multiple testing activations and a number are yet to activate their campaigns," Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia, the Head of the Higher Education HIV/AIDS programme (HEAIDS) which is leading the campaign, said.

The success of the campaign is also reflected in a number of Further Education and Training (FET) colleges that have joined the campaign this year. So far, five FET colleges had activated the campaign at 15 campuses with 2 258 students and staff tested for HIV.

The First Things First HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) campaign is a public-private partnership initiative led by HEAIDS in partnership with Innovative Medicines South Africa (IMSA), Foundation for Professional Development (FPD), Department of Health, and the South African National Aids Council (SANAC), with funding support by USAIDS and PEPFAR.

The First Things First campaign contributes to an objective of the 2012-2016 National Strategic Plan for HIV, STIs and TB to maximise opportunities for testing for HIV. The campaign provides for the testing of large numbers using HIV rapid finger prick tests. It is supported by an appropriate pre-test and post-test counselling and education programme.

"The success of the campaign goes beyond the numbers reached," Dr Ahluwalia said.

"Every person who tests HIV-positive in the campaign is directly enrolled in or referred to accessible treatment, care and support facilities.

"The campaign adds value to existing institutional HCT programmes, to the strengthening and sustainability of HIV programmes across the whole of the public higher education sector, and to making for a unified higher education sector response," Dr Ahluwalia continued.

"In the long lines of students and staff waiting to be counselled and tested at higher education institutions across the country, we may see the socialisation of HIV Counselling and Testing as normal, and a powerful response to the stigma that has been associated with HIV and AIDS," he said.

"In the context of the global drive that promotes treatment of HIV and AIDS as prevention, HCT assumes a far reaching significance that the First Things First campaign helps catapult," Dr Ahluwalia added.

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