

# **SPEECH: WELLNESS CENTRE LAUNCH, EPPING, CAPE TOWN**

**11 MAY 2011**

Programme Director

The CEO of SABCOHA

Representatives of the private sector

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening everyone!

I wish to congratulate the organisers for this important event that will strengthen health services that to our truckers. People involved in the road freight industry, especially drivers and their helpers are critical to the economy. One can say that they are the lifeblood of the economy. Equally, their health is important to their families and their communities.

The road freight industry criss crosses the country. The N1 links Cape Town, via Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Polokwane to Beit Bridge. The N2 links Nelson Mandela Metro East London, Mthatha with Pietermaritzburg and

Durban. The N3 links Durban with Johannesburg. And the N4 links Zeerust and Pretoria with Komati Poort. These are just the major transport routes in the country but it gives us some idea how widespread they are. It also points to be opportunities for the transmission of HIV and the opportunities for us to use truck stops as wellness facilities!

I am very encouraged by the work done by all those associated with developing and maintaining these wellness centres. This is a good example of private public partnerships and I wish to say a big thank you to those that have supported this initiative like SIDA and Mercedes Benz South Africa as well as the Bargaining Council for the Road Freight Industry and those that are implementing the programme, including Corridor Empowerment, Truck Wellness and SABCOHA.

Clearly we need to encourage the private sector to do more given the scale and scope of the HIV epidemic that we face as well as the other health conditions that confront truckers such as TB, hypertension and diabetes to name but a few.

Given this I am pleased that this intervention not only addresses HIV but is comprehensive in that other tests such as blood pressure, TB screening, syphilis testing, blood sugar, malaria - to name a few are also done. I also note that condoms are also distributed at the Wellness centres. This package of services is very much in line with the principles of HCT or HIV counseling and testing and is a key component to achieving a long healthy life for all South Africans.

Last year I signed a National Service Delivery Agreement with the President. I undertook, with the help of many partners, to increase life expectancy, decrease infant and maternal mortality, decrease the burden of disease from TB and HIV and strengthen the effectiveness of the health system.

In addition to this agreement, I also signed agreements with 11 government departments, one of them being the Department of Transport. The purpose of this particular agreement is to contribute to joint efforts in support of output 1, which is to increase life expectancy. This collaboration with the Department of Transport aims to reduce injuries but also aims to reduce HIV and AIDS incidence especially amongst truckers and other road users. This is to be done through targeted interventions for transport and haulage personnel.

As you know South Africa is facing a quadruple burden of disease. These are: high infant and maternal mortality; high prevalence of HIV and TB; increasing prevalence of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases; and violence and trauma. So both communicable diseases as well as diseases of lifestyle contribute to our health challenges.

Unfortunately, the biggest challenge that we have – that contributes to many aspects of the quadruple burden of disease is HIV. I am convinced that unless we deal decisively with HIV and AIDS that we will not be able to increase life expectancy and enable people to live healthy lives and hence why such collaborations such as this one to-day, are so important.

We must always remember that HIV is preventable! What does this mean? This means using a condom every time one has sexual intercourse. It means being faithful to your partner. It means not having multiple concurrent sexual partners. It means respecting women. It means getting tested and if positive seeking treatment early and adhering to treatment for both TB and HIV.

Unfortunately HIV has a twin – TB. With a 73% co-infection rate and with one in 100 South Africans having TB we cannot ignore TB.

To assist with an early diagnosis for TB, government has procured the GeneXpert diagnostic machines which now enable TB to be diagnosed much earlier than ever before in history.

My vision that all the major roads and routes in South Africa will be covered by this intervention and also that we ensure that we work our neighbours in SADC. We must ensure that wellness centres are established at every border post and port.

There are good practices that we can learn from as we scale up. These exist both in our country and elsewhere. Last year, with the MEC for Health for KwaZulu-Natal, at the invitation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation we visited Bangalore in India. I must say that we were very impressed with the programme that they are implementing. I have therefore invited them to visit South Africa and review our programme and give us some advice. I do hope that we will be able to review our programmes, learning from others, so that we can strengthen our programme even as we expand throughout our highway

network. Key is proper planning, comprehensive programming and effective monitoring. Monitoring our programmes is very important so that we can assess the impact of our work.

I would like to see an accelerated programme reflected in the new National Strategic Plan that is currently being drafted. In order to achieve this we need significant new partnerships with the road freight industry. I am sure that I can count on the private sector to play its part given that truckers are such an important resource to the industry and to their families.

In conclusion, can I again thank everyone for your contributions and formally launch this wellness centre in Epping.

I thank you!