

## **Business rallies to Government's call on health screening**

**Thursday: July 9, 2015:** The South African Business Coalition on Health and Aids (SABCOHA) and EOH Workplace Health and Wellness today announced the launch of Phase III of the most ambitious health screening project in South Africa. This announcement was made at an event attended by the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, where the successful implementation of Phase I and progress on Phase II within the community of the Gert Sibande District, Mpumalanga were presented.

The project, a joint initiative between SABCOHA and EOH Workplace Health and Wellness demonstrates how business is rallying to Government's call to fast track community health screening. It is about partnerships and it is hoped that it will encourage other corporates to take up the challenge and grow this initiative through additional funding.

It all began in 2009 when the South African National Aids Council (SANAC) embarked a programme to ensure business participates in the HIV Counselling and Testing Campaign (HCT) with the Global Fund as the International Funding agency. The Global Fund provides funding for campaigns that fight HIV, in needy countries while promoting partnerships between governments, civil society, the private sector and affected communities by relaying country ownership and performance based funding for communicable diseases in needy countries.

### *Why government private enterprise partnership is needed*

According to a report by the South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey, 2012 there is still a significant cause for concern and that there is a serious call for intervention as knowledge levels have declined and there is increased risky sexual behaviour. The research showed that people in informal areas continue to be most-at-risk of HIV, with the highest HIV incidence compared to those living in other areas.

There is a continued high HIV prevalence and incidence in the Black African population, particularly among females aged 20–34 years and males aged 25–49 years.

For this reason a strong multi-sectoral approach is necessary if socio-economic challenges that continue to fuel the epidemic are to be addressed.

In November last year, SABCOHA co-signed a pledge during the SANAC plenary meeting in Mpumalanga to implement the goals as set out in the Government's National Strategic Plan for HIV, STIs and TB 2016.

*This included: 'Reducing the number of infections, ensuring at least 80% of people eligible for treatment receive it; reducing the stigma, encouraging companies to screen for HIV and TB, reporting infection data to SANAC; working with the Department of Health and SANAC and commit to signing an agreement with Department of Health that would outline the elements of collaboration in the rollout and intensification of the HCT campaign and other health services to poorer communities.'*

During Phase I, SABCOHA was tasked to carry out 44 000 tests focussing on medically uninsured employees in the workplace as well as the community where employee wellness was a large focus. EOH pledged to help co-fund 14 000 of these but subsequently carried out over 22 000 tests.

The Phase II's objective was for SABCOHA to conduct 40 000 wellness screenings in 18 months. Once again EOH assisted with a donation of R1.1 million to carry out 10 000 screenings.

EOH's donation for Phase 111 is an additional R1.1 million to screen an additional 10 000 people.

Susan Preller, SABCOHA's COO says, "Phase II and III will focus on the environment and social development of micro enterprise by managing the health risk of entrepreneurs in this sector. This is core to the sustainability of any micro enterprise and the programme targets mostly women as part of the key vulnerable population groups." It is also linked to SABCOHA's BizAIDS training, focussing on risk management for micro enterprises.

Preller says, "The success of this model is based upon co-funding from the private sector to strengthen efforts of donor funded programmes. SABCOHA being a Non-profit organisation relies on donor funding to provide services to the informal business sector. According to the National Treasury Research on SMMEs (2008) South Africa has an estimated 2.8m small, medium and microenterprises (SMMEs) which contribute 52%-57% of GDP. SMMEs also provide about 60% of jobs, and contribute more than 40% of the country's total remuneration. This means that SMME's in South Africa employ more people than corporate within the private sector and government combined."

"EOH is honoured and humbled to be part of one of the most ambitious health screening projects ever undertaken between Government and the private sector, co-ordinated by SABCOHA and implemented by EOH Workplace Health and Wellness and various stakeholders, : says Asher Bohbot, CEO of EOH.

Rev Zwo Nevhutalu, Executive Manager from SANAC says, "The CSI budget for corporate South Africa is R8 billion (according to a recent report by Trialogue), of this only 12% is allocated to health. The majority – R4 billion is on education. Although this is essential in our country we believe not enough is being spent on health. One of our biggest challenges is the lack of resources but through SABCOHA and EOH's joint initiative we are hoping to encourage additional funding from business to implement the HIV/Aids response. We are not talking about reducing HIV/Aids... but ending it and we believe it can be fasttracked through partnerships."

*The objectives of the project include:*

- To conduct HIV/AIDS and wellness screening in remote areas where communities have not been tested and refer those with positive results to primary health care facilities
- In Phase II and III to focus on micro-enterprises where entrepreneurs may be affected who support families and, in some instances, create employment
- To contribute to the reduction of stigmatisation around getting screened and knowing your HIV status
- Create opportunities to educate the community on other lifestyle diseases and how to prevent them

"What makes the project unique is the fact that the screening takes place within the informal business sector and remote areas of the country – where people have never been tested," says Preller. "Mobile units are used to take the screening out to the community, ensuring a much

larger take up than previously experienced. The addition of wellness screening for lifestyle diseases was also a first. Lifestyle diseases are growing exponentially and taking a toll on our society, in terms of quality of life as well as the economic impact. When you consider that 70% of the women in South Africa are obese, the concomitant lifestyle diseases make this a shocking statistic.”

This project has resulted in SABCOHA, the private sector - represented by EOH and other partners and the Global Fund creating a blueprint for others to follow. The collaborative model demonstrates how Government and the private sector can work together to overcome not only HIV/AIDS but other non-communicable diseases, which are increasing at an alarming rate in South Africa.

*Community screening:*

We see it as a sequence of miracles,” says Carl Manser, EOH Executive – Business Growth and Sustainable Partnerships. “The screenings are having a ripple effect in the community – micro enterprise owners are encouraged to motivate their workers, partners, family members and customers to take up testing. Training and testing focus strongly on reducing stigma and discrimination - the more participants, the more you attract as there is less shame in the testing.

“It has also empowered small and micro business owners are able to educate their workers, customers and family members on the prevention of HIV/AIDS, negotiating safe sex practises and to dispel myths and superstitions – a major deterrent in finding out their HIV status as well as other potential health risks and seeking treatment. It is important to understand that managing health risk is key to the success of any small and micro business.” The project proves that taking healthcare into the communities – whether it’s by 4x4 or using nomadic tents – is possible.

“It is important that the screenings include and focus on TB,” says Rev Nevhutalu “As it is the number one killer in the country. By addressing the health of our disadvantaged society, we have the only sustainable response which is the root of all major transformations in society. We facilitate a sense of purpose that originates when people no longer accept current levels of service, join forces to rectify what they find is not working or improve and enhance those services and systems already in place.”

**Phase III begins on the August and will be completed on World AIDS Day on 1 December 2015.**

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