



MEDIA STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

World AIDS Day 1 December: Heading towards zero stigma and discrimination within the higher education & training sector

Pretoria, 30 November 2014 – This year, South Africa's higher education and training sector has tested 100 000 people for HIV, and screened them for STIs and TB. Health promotion initiatives including almost 400 activations across campuses reached two million students and are part of the sector's drive towards zero new infections and zero stigma and discrimination.

Marking the 26th World AIDS Day, the Higher Education and Training HIV/TB/STIs and general health and wellness programme (HEAIDS) acknowledges it is part of a comprehensive national partnership to achieve the objectives of the National Strategic Plan on HIV, STIs and TB.

"We salute everyone who is working to mitigate the impact of HIV on our people. We've seen the increased momentum in providing treatment but we must not become complacent – it is critical that we turn off the tap of new infections," says Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia, programme director of HEAIDS.

"Our engagement with young people indicates that some of them are letting down their guard because they think if they become infected with HIV, they can just get onto treatment. We must change this perception. Every day about a thousand South Africans – most of them young women – get infected with HIV. Until they are confronted with a positive HIV test result, most believe treatment is easy, which it is not. It is actually that person who lives with HIV understands and knows complications, challenges and difficulties of living with this disease both medically and socially within our communities."

"It is time now that we educate our more than 2 million young students within our colleges and universities who can further reach out to 25 individuals in their lives to share knowledge, skills and compassion with them – by so doing, we could positively impact on almost 60 million people within our nation."

During 2014, HEAIDS worked with 76 higher education institutions and 50 technical and vocational education and training colleges (TVETs). With partners, the programme trained 5000 peer mentors who are taking the messages on HIV prevention, safe sex, medical male circumcision, protection of sexual minorities and awareness of alcohol and drug abuse across and

beyond the higher education and training sector so that HEADS benefits not only its students and staff but also the broader community.

HEAIDS also puts the spotlight on social factors that contribute to ill health. These include stigma and discrimination which Dr Ahluwalia says divide communities into “us” and “them” – where “they” are those who are living with HIV or other diseases or individuals who choose to have same-sex relationships.

“Stigma and discrimination are detrimental factors that force HIV and other STIs into hiding, perpetuating fear which reduces willingness to test, weakens prevention efforts and hinders access to services.

“So we advocate and educate and run initiatives to prevent HIV infections and empower young women and men to own and protect their health – because good health is priceless,” concludes Dr Ahluwalia.

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Issued on behalf of HEAIDS by [Meropa Communications](#), telephone 0115067300

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About HEAIDS

The Higher Education and Training HIV/AIDS Programme (HEAIDS) is an initiative of the Department of Higher Education and Training that is undertaken by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) to support public universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges (TVETs) in responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic through their core functions of learning and teaching, research and innovation, and community engagement. As part of an increasingly comprehensive response to HIV, HEAIDS implements a number of programmes and projects in partnership with a wide range of public and private role players. Programme elements include:

- The *First Things First* HIV counselling and testing campaign.
- HEAIDS-Brothers for Life, a masculinities programme that includes Medical Male Circumcision. It is promoted as part of a healthy sex life that includes being faithful to a single partner, avoiding alcohol abuse, and wearing condoms.
- HEAIDS-ZAZI, an advocacy and mobilisation campaign that addresses gender inequalities that drive HIV risk, like gender-based violence and transactional sex.
- *Balance Your Life*, a primary prevention response to alcohol and substance abuse as HIV risk factors, which provides professional assistance to those needing it.
- A programme to develop an enabling environment on campuses and provide access to HIV prevention, care and treatment services for men who have sex with men and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexed individuals on campuses.
- A campus radio pilot project that is aimed at developing compelling programming around HIV/AIDS and related topics like gender violence, substance abuse, human rights and social justice.