

Balfour Community Set For a State of the Art Medical Centre by Next Year

The community of Balfour in the Raymond Mhlaba Municipality is upbeat as their much-anticipated state of the art clinic nears its completion date.

The Eastern Cape Department of Health started the construction of the building in March 2023, after the old building became dilapidated and unfit to be occupied.

The building which was a house that belonged to a local farmer was built in 1938 and its structure had began to fall apart, with large cracks on the wall, wholes on the floor, with some windows and parts of the roof being blow off by the winds. Vernomous reptiles were also seen regularly inside the old building, posing a great danger to both staff and patients.

The new building under construction worth R52 059 253.81 is expected to be completed and fully furnished with the latest cutting-edge healthcare equipment by March 2025.

The new clinic will have five consultation rooms, a staff accommodation building that will have four rooms for healthcare professionals, a guard house, and a security parameter fence. Nkosi Mphakamisi Koli, chair of the Balfour clinic committee, said when they arrived in the orange farming area in 1988, they had no access to healthcare, and when the democratic government was elected their lives changed.

Koli said the community was then allocated healthcare workers who used the old building, a gesture that was welcomed by the residents. He said the community was grateful that the project will see them having a "much-needed and beautiful clinic."

"We were concerned about the state of the old building because it was falling apart, due to it being old. In some of the spaces in that house, you would easily find a snake hiding," said Koli. "We were really concerned about the safety of our healthcare workers here because we have a lot of black mambas here which are lethal.

"We are so grateful that the department of health finally hid our call. We were not expecting a clinic this big. We are so grateful because our people don't have money to travel to other places like Komani to access healthcare."

Currently, the clinic operates in a temporary structure set up by the Department of Health in 2023 August has two professional nurses, a data capture, cleaner, groundsman, councilor, and two community health workers.

The clinic services 17 communities under Balfour - with the majority of the people only surviving with seasonal haversting jobs which come and go.

Professional nurse and acting sister in charge at Barlfor Nomzamo Kewuti, who started working at the institution in 2008 on a busy day she and her counterpart could easily get 80 patients.

"We divided the patients amongst the two of us professional nurses, meaning I can see more than 40 patients because this clinic serves a large community," said Kewuti.

She said many nurses had left or declined to work at the old building as it was "unattractive," but now she foresaw a change, thanks to the new building.

"Having a building of this caliber will help or motivate healthcare professionals to stay here. There was nothing good about that building.

"Now this new building will help attract more nurses because in the past people would decline appointment immediately they heard that they would be sent here.

"Especially young nurses who are coming out of school, they don't want to come here. But with the new building, I have hope that we will be able to retain staff and continue to provide better healthcare to our people here."

Kewuti said working in the old make-shift clinic was a nightmare due to lack of space, amongst other things.

"In that house, we did not have enough room to do our work.

"Also being cramped in that house was hampering us from providing youth friendly services to our school going patients because we had to mix all patients.

"Whereas we want to serve youth in a conducive environment because some of them their parents come here. And they come here for things like birth control, and they might not be comfortable with their parents knowing that.

Kewuti added: "This new clinic will address a lot of those issues we had because I love my job, and I don't want to abandon these people. They have welcomed us and have treated us like we are their family."

Thandiswa Baartman, clinic committee secretary, said she was hopeful the new building would attract more young healthcare workers.

"We have a lot of HIV patients who collect treatment here, and those people should be assisted in their own space, which was difficult in the old building.

"Now we will have emergency rooms and other space where we as the community will be assisted."

By Mfundo Piliso

