

**REMARKS BY EASTERN CAPE MEC FOR HEALTH, N. Y. CAPA DURING THE
WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY PROGRAMME ON 10 OCTOBER 2024**

Programme director

Masibulele kumfundisi ngomthandazo

The Executive Mayor of Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Hon. Cllr Mhlelembana

Mayor of Winnie Madikizela Mandela Local Municipality, Hon. Cllr Mafumbatha

All political leaders that are among us today

EAPA South Africa Board President, Ms Vandaryar

ECDoh DDGs Xamlashe and Mavuso

Senior managers from head office

District and sub-district senior management

CEOs of hospitals

Our governance structures

Trade union leaders among us

Mental health activists

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning

We are gathered here today to shine the spotlight on mental health, along with the rest of the world as we observe World Mental Health Day under the theme: **“It is Time to Prioritise Mental Health in the Workplace.”**

Mental health is still misunderstood in many communities so we must scale up our awareness campaigns so that we educate our people and normalise talking about it more. It is important for every person to understand that we are all candidates of mental health challenges.

We must do our best to demystify mental health and demolish the stigma associated with it.

The United Nations Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2024 is a global call for organisations, teams and individuals to step up efforts to:

- Prevent risks to mental health at work;
- Promote well-being and protecting mental health at work; and
- Support personnel with mental health conditions.

As a department we must also do our best to ensure that our personnel get the mental health services they need so that they will continue doing what they do best – save lives.

We need management to ensure that our employee assistance programmes / wellness programmes are adequately resourced so that we are able to meet the need for services.

It cannot be correct that last year only **3 008** employees were assisted out of a workforce of **48 000**. We need to improve so that our staff – who are our best assets will get the assistance they need.

The fact that only **40%** of the Eastern Cape Department of Health employees are currently on medical aid, means the majority get their service from the public sector when they need treatment.

On a daily basis, our employees, particularly first responders deal with traumatic situation, which might impact on their mental health and well-being. Health work is by nature caring and daily witness of trauma, illness, injury and death, weighs heavily on employee's mental health.

There is high incidence of burnout, compassion fatigue and post-traumatic stress, so it is imperative that we ensure that our employee assistance programme/ wellness programmes are adequately resources and effective.

We must care for the carers.

Our records show that workplace drivers of mental illness include:

- Weak leadership and management practices;
- Harassment and bullying;
- Discrimination and exclusion – age, gender, race;
- Conflict;
- Poor / unsafe working conditions;
- Lack of control – job design and workload;
- Inadequate work resources; and
- Poor work-life balance

Managers must create conducive environments so that their staff can thrive. Toxic work environments can also contribute to mental health issues, so let's ensure that we operate in spaces that are friendly and psychologically safe

Prioritising the wellness of healthcare workers is essential to maintaining a healthy and motivated workforce.



Promoting physical and mental health, encouraging healthy coping mechanisms, and promoting work-life balance are essential for maintaining a healthy and motivated workforce.

By investing in the wellness of our workers, we will ensure that healthcare workers are better equipped to provide the highest quality care to our people. Being a healthcare worker is demanding and can be frustrating because at times healthcare workers deal with very serious issues.

We want healthcare workers to balance their work and personal lives.

Let us make time for sport, recreation and other activities as part of work, which can help reduce stress levels, improve morale and build team spirit for improved mental health and quality of life.

We must do everything we can to ensure that our mental health review boards are also adequately resourced and have tools of trade, within the available budget.

Programme director, people with mental health issues must not be locked away from the rest of society. That is gross violation of their rights.

Mental health goes beyond a family or government issue. It's a society issue that needs all of us. The UN also emphasises this.

Statistics have shown that mental illness is the third highest contributor to the burden of disease whilst **16.5%** of South Africans suffer from a mental disorder in a given 12 months and about **75%** have not had the benefit of receiving treatment.

We must redouble our efforts and ensure that everyone who needs mental health services get the help they need. Mental illness is treatable and there shouldn't be any reason why people cannot recover and be fully functional.

Sadly, there is still a lot of stigma associated with mental illnesses, especially in black communities. This is one of the biggest challenges that we are still faced with today when it comes to mental illness.

As we continuously strive to improve mental health services, we must also ensure that we debunk the myths around mental health. With treatment, people with mental health challenges are able to play active roles in society.

It is our intention to partner with the private sector and other social partners to directly support all our mental health users, both internal and external. This is because we understand that health is not a Department of Health issue but a society issue.

We need everyone to play their part. Traditional leaders, the religious fraternity, institutions of higher learning, civil society and communities all have a role to play. We need all hands on deck if we are to turn the corner.

I want to also make a call to psychiatrists both in the public and private sector to join us in the fight of promoting, treating and rehabilitating those directly and indirectly affected by mental health.



Ladies and gentlemen, we must also say that in some cases, mental health issues are as a result of drug abuse. We cannot run away from that sad reality. This is why we must always at every opportunity that we get, drum it into our youth, so that they don't abuse alcohol and drugs.

The youth are the future of this great nation so we need them to be mentally fit and healthy so that when the time comes for them to pick up the baton, they will be able to take us to the promised land.

Although there is a lot that still needs to be done to improve mental health services, a lot of work is already happening.

Our hospitals provide 72-hours observation services, including child and adolescent mental health. This is over and above the dedicated state-of-the-art child and adolescent mental health unit at Fort England, which the department spent **R29.1-million** renovating.

The opening up of the child and adolescent unit has improved access of mental health services in the province. Fort England Hospital is central in the reduction of observations as well as state patients, thus reducing the number of inmates admitted in prisons.

The appointment of CEOs at our mental health facilities has assisted in providing stability and leadership, resulting in better mental health outcomes.

The appointment of psychiatrists, psychologists, and registered counsellors has also improved access of communities to much-needed psychological services to the people of the Eastern Cape in particular rural areas.

During the 2023/24 financial year, a total of **2 821** individuals were seen and a total **40** public mental health empowerment sessions have been conducted in the first year of appointment of registered counsellors.

Ladies and gentlemen, given the financial constraints and the lack of suitably qualified staff for mental health units, there is an immediate and urgent need to address the infrastructure challenges experienced at district hospitals, where mental healthcare users are currently being cared for in medical wards.

The staff of the casualty department and medical wards at district hospitals are, in many cases, responsible for the care and management of mental healthcare users in need of 72-hour observation.

The department appointed CDC as the implementing agent for the 72-hour psychiatric programme in January 2023 to ensure these issues are addressed and the vision is realised.

The scope of this programme includes:

- Minor additions and alterations to existing hospitals (casualty or wards) to accommodate patients suspected of requiring mental healthcare as a short- to medium-term intervention. This will involve addressing damage caused by vandalism or patients, and creating an enabling clinical environment for individuals undergoing 72-hour assessments. The current status of this programme is that

assessments and preliminary design approaches have been concluded for 29 hospitals, with a budget of **R54-million** allocated over the 2024/25 MTEF. These include Oliver and Adelaide Tambo Regional Hospital, Mount Ayliff Hospital, Madzikane kaZulu Memorial Hospital and Taylor Bequest in Matatiele here in Alfred Nzo.

- The department is investing close to **R120-million** in a new mental health unit at St Barnabas Hospital that will include 14 male beds, 10 female beds, 4 adolescent beds (male and female), and support spaces such as treatment rooms, counselling rooms, seclusion rooms, exercise yards, occupational therapy activity rooms, offices, and ancillary services such as sluicing facilities, storerooms, and kitchens. This project is currently at the re-tender stage, following the termination of the initial contract when the project was near 90% completion;
- At Tower Hospital, the department invested close to **R12-million** in high-security perimeter fencing as an initial step toward major repairs and renovations of Tower Mental Hospital. The department is now actively engaged in the design process for Phase 2 of the Tower Hospital improvements, which will focus on significant renovations to the hospital.
- The department is investing approximately **R7-million** in the repair, refurbishment, and renovation of a 60-bed unit at Mthatha mental health unit. Already, 30 bed male ward has been completed, and now it will move over to 30 bed female ward.

In conclusion, mental health is integrated in primary healthcare, including in the school health programme in our country because we are concerned about the well-being of our population.

This is also in line with the UN General Assembly's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 3 talks about ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. If we don't make mental health and well-being for all a global priority – then we will not achieve goal 3.

The National Development Plan and the Provincial Development Plan also stress the importance of ensuring we have universal health coverage by 2030. Mental health cannot be left behind or else we will forever talk about working towards universal health coverage.

Ensuring we have an optimally functioning mental health in the province is in line with the governing party's commitment of ensuring universal access to quality healthcare.

Our purpose in strengthening community mental health is to ensure:

- Equitable access across the province to 72-hour mental health assessment units;
- Safety of healthcare workers and patients while undergoing 72-hour assessment;
- This requires adequate infrastructure, appropriate medication, and appropriate knowledge and skills of HCWs; and
- Adequate knowledge of the Mental Health Care Act and the correct use of Mental Health Care Act forms.

I thank you.

