

Keynote Address by Hon. MEC Ntandokazi Capa

Ms Nomfundiso Gagai, Chairperson – DWSA

President of BCM Sport Federation- Zizo Papu

Disabled Youth South Africa (DYSA) in the Eastern Cape

Leaders and Members of Disabled People South Africa

Various stakeholders present

Programme Director, distinguished guests, good morning.

When we gather to speak about disability in South Africa, we are not only discussing health. We are talking about justice, dignity, and equality. The statistics have reminded us for many years that disability is more prevalent among women than men, and that it increases as people grow older. But behind those figures are human beings — mothers, daughters, sons, grandmothers — whose lives continue to be shaped by poverty, unemployment, and exclusion. That is why today is not just another event on the calendar. Today is a statement of intent. It is a commitment that in this province, disability is not an afterthought. It is central to the way we deliver healthcare and development.

We must confront the truth that people living with disabilities, and especially women and young people, remain among the most marginalised in our society. Too many still live without the tools for independence and full participation. For far too long, a wheelchair has been treated as a donation, a prosthetic as a luxury, and a hearing aid as a favour. Today, we say, firmly and clearly, these are not favours. They are constitutional rights. They are instruments of freedom, of participation, and of dignity.

It is fitting that this programme began as part of Women's Month. The voices of women with disabilities must be at the forefront of our work. We know the triple burden they face: the struggle against gender inequality, the struggle against poverty, and the struggle against exclusion from assistive technology.

We also know that when women are empowered, families and communities are strengthened. That is why our focus in the Eastern Cape is unapologetically gender-responsive. We are saying, without hesitation, that women and girls living with disabilities must no longer be invisible. They must be leaders, decision-makers, and beneficiaries of transformation.

Through this Disability Health Outreach, the Province is taking the lead nationally in building rights-based, gender-responsive healthcare. We are expanding mobile health services into our most rural and marginalised communities. We are creating systems that match devices to real needs and ensure that aftercare and training are part of the process. And we are working side by side with Disabled People South Africa, Disabled Women South Africa, and Disabled Youth South Africa to move away from once-off donations towards sustainable, systemic delivery. This is the kind of leadership and partnership that ensures no one is left behind.

But let us be clear: this responsibility cannot rest with the Department of Health alone. The task of restoring dignity to people living with disabilities requires the collective effort of Education, Social Development, Transport, Sport, the private sector, and communities themselves. We must unite around a single vision — that no child is excluded from education because of a missing device, that no woman should suffer to survive when she has the right to walk with dignity, and that no elder should live in isolation because support has not reached them.

To the disability sector, I want to say this: we hear you, we see you, and we are walking this path with you, not for you. To our partners and stakeholders, I say let us keep building together — because dignity is not negotiable. And to every person living with a disability in our province, let this day be a reminder that your struggle is recognised, your rights are guaranteed, and your future matters.

Together, we will build a South Africa where disability does not mean exclusion, but empowerment. A South Africa where rights are not favours, and where dignity is not delayed, but delivered.

I thank you.