



**MEDIA ADVISORY  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
21 OCTOBER 2025**

**EASTERN CAPE HEALTH AND OPERATION SMILE TO DELIVER TRANSFORMATIVE SURGERIES IN MTHATHA.**

The Eastern Cape Department of Health, under the leadership of MEC Ntandokazi Capa, in partnership with Operation Smile South Africa (OSSA) and the National Department of Health, will deliver life-changing cleft surgeries and oral health services in Mthatha from 23–26 October 2025.

This long-standing collaboration between Operation Smile and the Eastern Cape Department of Health will see over 40 patients, primarily children with cleft lip and cleft palate, travelling from across the province and neighbouring areas to be assessed for surgery by a multidisciplinary team of medical volunteers at Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital. Between 25 and 26 October, approximately 30 cleft lip and cleft palate surgeries are expected to be performed.

Simultaneously, an integrated oral health outreach programme will be rolled out at Mthatha Regional Hospital by the Department's Dental Services, in collaboration with the National Department of Health and supported by Operation Smile and key donors.

Over 50 dental professionals from provincial and national health teams will provide free oral health care services to about 1,500 Mthatha residents between 23 and 25 October. Services will include screenings, extractions, fillings, cleanings, and fluoride applications, as well as oral health education sessions at 13 local schools, led by the National Department of Health's Dental Services unit.

MEC Ntandokazi Capa said the Department is proud to continue a partnership that demonstrates the power of collaboration between government and health partners in delivering quality, equitable care.

"Safe surgery and good oral health are essential for overall well-being and dignity," said MEC Capa. "Our ultimate goal is to ensure that children with clefts have early access to life-changing surgery and comprehensive care, and that no child misses school, and no adult misses work, because of oral health challenges. Prevention, treatment, and education remain at the heart of our efforts."

Executive Director of Operation Smile South Africa, Sarah Scarth, said the collaboration continues to transform lives and strengthen local health capacity.

“Together with the Eastern Cape Department of Health, we are not only restoring smiles but also building sustainable, comprehensive cleft and oral healthcare in the province,” said Scarth. “Early surgical intervention unlocks a child’s ability to feed well, speak clearly, and grow up with confidence and dignity.”

These interventions go beyond physical transformation. They are about restoring dignity and inclusion to individuals who have sometimes been excluded or stigmatised due to traditional beliefs associated with cleft conditions. The impact reaches far beyond the operating theatre; it helps rebuild confidence, strengthens families, and supports the re-assimilation of individuals into their communities, allowing them to fully participate in society with pride and self-assurance.

Since its establishment in South Africa in 2006, Operation Smile has performed over 500 free surgeries across the country, with the support of a network of more than 160 specialist volunteers, including surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses, paediatricians, speech therapists, dentists, and psychologists.

A key feature of this year’s mission is the development of skills for local healthcare professionals. Peer-learning, workshops, and mentoring opportunities will be embedded in the programme to strengthen hospital systems, enhance post-surgical care, and ensure sustainable improvements in long-term patient outcomes.

**Media is invited to attend and cover the event.**

## **Event Details**

**Dates:** 23–26 October 2025

**Surgery Venue:** Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital, Mthatha

**Oral Health Outreach Venue:** Mthatha Regional Hospital

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**Issued jointly by the Eastern Cape Department of Health and Operation Smile South Africa.**