

HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING HIV-TESTING CAMPAIGN VISTS ALEXANDRA

Johannesburg, 29 August 2014 – Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training Honourable Mduduzi Manana today visited the Johannesburg Central TVET College (Alexandra Campus) for the “first things first” HIV/AIDS and TB campaign.

Now in its fourth year, the annual *First Things First* campaign encourages students at tertiary institutions – and especially incoming first year students – to take responsibility for knowing their HIV status.

“The purpose of this campaign is to contribute to the National Strategic Plan which seeks to eradicate the scourge of HIV/AIDS. It focuses on testing as well as pre and post-testing counselling and TB screening amongst other things in the post school learning institutions. This knowledge is a cornerstone for proactively managing one’s health, because once people know their status, they can appreciate the benefits of prevention and timely access to treatment;” said Deputy Minister Manana.

A key programme of the Higher Education and Training HIV/ AIDS Programme (HEAIDS), *First Things First* is a public-private initiative implemented in partnership with a number of entities including the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC).

Earlier in the day, the Deputy Minister had a walkabout around the campus encouraging students who were taking their HIV tests and TB screening. “We have already seen an increase in the lifespan of South Africans which is a direct result of people who are HIV positive getting treatment. In addition, having large numbers of people who are HIV positive and on treatment and virally suppressed, helps to decrease new infections;” continued the Deputy Minister.

Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia, the Director of HEAIDS, said: “The extension of our mandate to support the development of a programmatic response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic at TVET colleges is a milestone achievement. Through the involvement of TVETs, the sector's HIV prevention, care and treatment programme is extended to the almost 2 000 000 young people who study at TVETs and university campuses”.

“It has been observed that TVET colleges are community based colleges and mostly confined in townships and rural areas. Through our *First things First* campaign and the recently launched Women health Programme we have seen a huge community participation in all our activations and launches towards collective response. Community heads, farm workers, chiefs, high schools and at times unions join with us during these activations. Most of the students within the TVETs are from their own communities and it helps spread our communication/mobilisation for HIV/TB/STI to communities much faster. Similarly it has been evident in the form of our peer educators who have been accepted to educate nearby communities much faster than other members considering that

they are knowledge workers, belong to their own communities and understand issues faster; concluded Dr Ahluwalia.

The Deputy Minister also signed the pledge wall assuring his support for this programme. He then invited the students to do the same and take care of their health.

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Issued on behalf of HEAIDS by Meropa Communications. For information and interviews, contact Zenzele Bam, email zenzeleb@meropa.co.za, telephone 0115067300.

About First Things First

The award-winning campaign is a public-private initiative led by HEAIDS in partnership with the Foundation for Professional Development (FPD) with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR); the Departments of Higher Education and Training, and Health; and the SA National AIDS Council (SANAC).

First Things First is an essential implementation element of the 2012-2016 National Strategic Plan for HIV, STIs and TB, as it provides for the testing of large numbers using HIV rapid finger prick tests, supported by appropriate pre-test and post-test counselling and education. *First Things First* speaks to the priority of HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT). The campaign unites tens of thousands of students and staff at higher education and training institutions across the country to reject HIV stigma and test to know their status. It is a necessary step to accessing treatment, care and support and preventing new infections.

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.