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Free State ART Shortages- TAC Demands Answers and Accountability

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On 19 December 2009 TAC wrote to Sakhiwo Belot, MEC for Health for the Free State Province, asking for clarity on a range of issues relating to the Free State?s critical, life threatening shortages of antiretroviral drugs. After having failed to receive a response from MEC Belot?s offices, TAC sent a follow-up letter on 21 January 2009, the deadline for response for which was yesterday, 26 January 2009. We are still awaiting a reply.

The lack of response from MEC Belot is particularly troublesome given the urgency of the situation. The financial crisis in the Free State Health Department led to the decision to suspend the Province?s ART roll-out. Since we were originally alerted to stoppages and shortages of ART in the Free State in November of last year, our investigations into the matter have revealed that the situation has worsened. Despite a reportedR9.5 million transfer by National Treasury ? funds that originated from the US Centres for Disease Control- to support the Free State?s ART programme, we continue to receive reports that no new patients, except for pregnant women, are being initiated onto antiretroviral therapy and that baseline blood work for people living with HIV has been suspended at all public sector health facilities.

Worryingly we have also begun to receive information from health care workers on the ground that the impact of the current financial crisis in the Free State is no longer restricted to the province?s ART programme but that a range of other health programmes are now being affected and that many essential medicines apart from ARV?s are now also in critically short supply.

We call on Mr Belot to respond to fulfill his duty as an MEC. Respond to our letters explaining what actions you will be taking to rectify this unacceptable situation.

- Antiretrovirals
- Treatment Plan

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