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Update on preparations for the HCT Campaign launch from TAC Gert Sibande

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Gert Sibande district has an HIV prevalence rate of 40.5%, which is the highest in Mpumalanga province. The HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) campaign is important to detecting new cases and increasing access to treatment, care and prevention in the district. To effectively rollout a sustainable HCT Campaign, the district must address crippling human resource shortages. TAC is working in partnership with the Gert Sibande district Department of Health to advance a successful HCT campaign rollout and uptake of services.

TAC Gert Sibande will support the HCT Campaign through its prevention and treatment literacy (PTL) and community health advocacy (CHA) programmes. The district has already carried out trainings for the prevention and treatment literacy practitioners (PTLPs) and community health advocates (CHAs) on the updated treatment guidelines published on 1 April 2010.

Following the trainings, TAC PTLPs carried out trainings with healthcare workers (particularly nurses) on the updated guidelines. TAC PTLPs reported that this was an important activity in the district. They found that while nurses were aware of the main updates announced in President Zuma?s 2009 World AIDS Day speech, they had not been educated on the new guidelines and how they should be implemented.

TAC PTLPs disseminated information to nurses in 18 sites providing antiretroviral treatment. PTLPs reported that the information they provided was welcomed by nurses in most cases.

TAC Gert Sibande also carried out trainings on the updated guidelines for other branches in the province. TAC accredited branches are run by TAC members who volunteer their time to provide HIV/TB education to communities and advocate for their rights at a local level.

TAC Gert Sibande carried out trainings with branches on the updated guidelines and the upcoming HCT campaign. Branches will work in communities to further disseminate the information. Through empowering communities and branches with this knowledge, they will be able to demand proper implementation of the updated guidelines and HCT campaign in their areas.

This process was then followed with a door-to-door campaign. The door-to-door campaign encouraged people to get tested through the HCT campaign, to access earlier treatment and to inform them of their health rights under the new guidelines. For example women were informed of expanded access to pap smears under the new guidelines and the increased risks of cervical cancer for women living with HIV.

In working together with government, TAC has engaged in regular planning meetings convened by the Department of Health and the Gert Sibande District AIDS Council. The planning meetings focused on the collective drafting of the programme for the launch, and methods to encourage social mobilization and uptake. TAC and partners have agreed to play a central role in community social mobilization.

During May TAC Gert Sibande will meet with all the HAART coordinators in the district to look at how TAC branches

can play a role in supporting the HCT district target. The district aims to test 582 000 people in a population of 920 580. TAC branches will conduct door-to-door campaign activities in the broader community around HCT to encourage people to get tested.
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