

PRESS RELEASE

South Africa takes bold step to provide HIV treatment for all

Antiretroviral therapy to be offered to all people living with HIV as soon as possible after HIV-positive diagnosis

GENEVA, 13 May 2016—The Government of South Africa has announced a major policy shift that will move the world faster towards the global 90–90–90 treatment target. On 10 May 2016, the South African Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, announced in his Health Budget Vote Speech to the Parliament of South Africa that the country will implement a new evidence-based policy of offering HIV treatment to all people living with HIV by September 2016. This groundbreaking announcement brings South Africa, which already has the world’s largest HIV treatment programme, in line with the latest World Health Organization guidelines on HIV treatment. South Africa is among the first countries in Africa to formally adopt this policy.

South Africa already encourages everyone who is HIV-negative or who does not know their HIV status to be tested for HIV at least once a year. However, instead of having to undergo an additional test of the immune system (the CD4 cell count) to determine eligibility for treatment, people who are diagnosed HIV-positive will be offered HIV treatment as soon as possible after diagnosis.

“South Africa takes another bold step towards ending its AIDS epidemic by 2030, once again demonstrating that scientific evidence, paired with political will, saves lives,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé.

This major advance comes only months after the government announced that it will provide pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to sex workers in 10 sex worker programmes from June this year. South Africa is also considering whether to expand the offer of PrEP to prevent HIV in vulnerable young women, based on the lessons learned from demonstration projects.

These combined efforts demonstrate the South African Government’s commitment to maximizing the benefits of antiretroviral medicines for both the prevention and treatment of HIV. This approach has proved to be highly effective in reducing new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths in high-prevalence settings, such as South Africa.

Provision of HIV treatment for all is estimated to cost an additional US\$ 66 million per year and will be paid for by South Africa from domestic resources in this year’s budget.

While much success has been achieved by the country’s HIV treatment programme, with approximately 3.5 million people on HIV treatment today, the number of new HIV infections is unacceptably high, with an estimated 340 000 new HIV infections in 2014.

“The United Nations has a vision to transform the world through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” said Mr Motsoaledi. “Ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health

threat by 2030 is among the Sustainable Development Goals. The South African Department of Health is committed to this goal and achieving a long and healthy life for all South Africans.”

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Contact

UNAIDS Geneva | Alasdair Reid | tel. +41 22 791 1352 | reida@unaids.org

UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube.