



## PRESS RELEASE

### Empowering and protecting South African youth features at AIDS 2016

Durban, 15 July 2016 – National post-school initiatives to reach, empower and protect South African youth were highlighted at the AIDS 2016 conference that started in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal today.

Over two million three hundred students and young people – population at the forefront of HIV infection and concomitant risks such as unplanned pregnancy, intergenerational sex, multiple concurrent partnerships, alcohol and drug abuse and gender violence – are targeted by the national Higher Education and Training HIV/AIDS Programme, HEAIDS, whose key focus area and beneficiaries are young South Africans.

HEAIDS works with the Departments of Higher Education and Training and Health and other role players from government, civil society, development partners and private sector to implement youth-centred programmes focusing on mitigating the impact of HIV/STIs/TB and a comprehensive package of health and wellness services in the post-schooling community – students and staff alike.

Speaking in the HEAIDS session at AIDS 2016, its Director Dr Ahluwalia said: “South Africa has the world’s highest HIV incidence rates across age and gender groups. Young women and girls are a notable key population – every week about 2000 South African girls and young women aged 15 to 24 get infected with HIV.

“It will, therefore, be imperative for the HEAIDS programme through its emerging good practice First Things First HIV, STIs, TB model to continue providing a comprehensive package of health services to those who require it –including the LGBTI community that research has reflected have limited access to sexual and reproductive health services.

“HEAIDS’ own research of HIV prevalence in the higher education sector affirms other research about the protective and HIV risk-lowering effect of education. It is imperative we support young people in completing their studies and becoming independent and productive members of our society and economy,” said Dr Ahluwalia.

The holistic approach targets some 2.3 million beneficiaries by accessing 76 higher education and training institutions with 429 campuses around the country to tackle HIV, its core drivers



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including social, gender and age disparity, and other related health and wellness concerns at a sectoral level.

HEAIDS is able to develop and roll out programmes which work beyond an individual or institutional level to span the entire sector – thus ensuring cohesion, efficiency and greater results.

The champion of the HEAIDS programme, Deputy Minister Mduduzi Manana, said if unaddressed, HIV risk factors affect educational outcomes so the main objective is to improve the availability of information and services about HIV and youth health more broadly.

“The HEAIDS programme has been able through its evidence-based interventions to grow from offering generic HIV, STIs, TB testing and screening services for our vulnerable young generation to availing a comprehensive package of adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services,” Deputy Minister Manana said.

HEAIDS runs the annual testing campaign called First Things First which covers all institutions to host activations where thousands of students and youth come to test for HIV and screen for TB and STIs and other conditions. This helps to reduce stigma and promotes testing, referrals to services and advocacy within the community.

First Things First had a dynamic year last year: it enabled 174 000 to get tested for HIV – 79% higher than in the previous year. Nearly 600 campus activations were held during 2015 – topping the 2014 figure by 58% and the sector was a conduit for distributing a record 25 million condoms to students and young people.

“Because of the national reach, we’re getting more involved in confronting the main drivers of the HIV epidemic – dealing with rape, gender inequality and violence, disparities in terms of age and social status within relationships and protecting the rights of sexual minorities. These are big national issues and require our attention,” emphasised Dr Ahluwalia.

In addition:

- HEAIDS supports thousands of peer educators. Many are openly living with HIV and have survived rape or other challenges and are now helping their peers tackle similar situations.
- HEAIDS is also making headway in the endeavour towards further prioritising health by working with relevant stakeholders to institutionalise health and wellness education into the curricula of various post-school organisations.

“We are proudly a member of the national and global effort to end AIDS and to empower and protect youth because healthy youth mean healthy careers, families, communities and economies,” concluded Dr Ahluwalia.

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**About HEAIDS ([www.heids.org.za](http://www.heids.org.za))**

The Higher Education and Training HIV & AIDS Programme (HEAIDS) aims to develop and support HIV/TB/STI mitigation initiatives and promote health and wellness across South Africa's public higher education institutions (HEIs) and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges.

It is a programme of the Department of Higher Education and Training that is undertaken by Higher Education South Africa (HESA), the representative body of the 26 HEIs, in partnership with South African College Principals Organisation (SACPO), the representative body of 50 public TVETs.

As part of an increasingly comprehensive HIV/TB/STI mitigation programme in the higher education and training sector, HEAIDS implements the following projects in partnership with a range of public and private sector role players:

- First Things First HCT/TB/STI General Health & Wellness Programme
- Men Health and Empowerment Programme
- Women Health and Empowerment Programme
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme
- MSM and LGBTI Programme
- Academic Capacity Development Programme
- Future Beats Youth Development and HIV prevention through campus radio and social media.

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