

Media Statement: TAC welcome permanent appointment of MEC for Health and list key areas of concern

Johannesburg, 2 December 2020 – The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) welcomes the Gauteng Premier David Makhura’s appointment of a new permanent Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Health in the province today.

According to the Premier Dr. Nomathemba Mokgethi, “is not new to the health sector and her knowledge, experience and qualifications makes her a strong candidate to lead the health portfolio. Her vast experience as a seasoned administrator is an added advantage in steering the department to good performance.”

We have noted on multiple occasions that the period since the implementation of the lockdown has been filled with turmoil since Dr Bandile Masuku vacated the position amidst corruption allegations. We extend our thanks to the MEC for Jacob Mamabolo who acted during this extraordinary period. We acknowledge that it must not have been easy bringing stability to the Health portfolio while also working as the MEC for Transport.

Tough job ahead for her

We note that the province is lagging behind in the HIV and TB response, having only achieved 89%-66%-88% of the 90-90-90 targets by the end of 2019¹. These numbers were inimically affected by COVID-19. Furthermore, the Ritshidze [State of Gauteng](#) report highlights that the antiretroviral treatment programme has made very little gains. While 160, 247 people tested HIV positive in PEPFAR priority districts in the province until the end of quarter three of the PEPFAR year - June 2020 - only 82% - 131, 070 – were initiated on treatment. Worryingly, there was a net gain of only 1, 070 patients on the programme during this time, instead of the 131, 070 we would assume if patients had not fallen out of care. Jack Bloom, a provincial MPL goes further to argue that [225,000 people living with HIV \(PLHIV\)](#) in the province have fallen out of care, according to the GDoH’s second quarter report. This is one window into many aspects that highlight a health system that needs to be resuscitated.

We call on the new MEC to prioritise the following areas in her first 100 days:

- The implementation of welcome back services necessary to ensure that patients lost to care return.
- More HIV and TB screening and testing to complement COVID-19 efforts.
- The reduction of TB mortality rates. To this effect we call for the declaration of TB as a public health emergency.
- Reduction in the number of stockouts and shortages of medicines at facilities.
- We call for an end to the high number of acting roles in the department ([78 between April and September](#) this year) highlighted by MEC Mamabolo as well as an end of health worker shortages.
- The expanding of the multi-month dispensing of ARVs to include three and six month supply to improve retention in care.

¹ Thembisa model 4.3, available at <https://www.thembisa.org/>.

- Sensitisation of health care workers on key population friendly service provision in order to ensure that the minimum package of services is available at health care facilities.

We will be reaching out to the new MEC for Health in the next few days to offer support and highlight work we have done as TAC and in partnership with other organisations as part of [Ritshidze](#). We have been clear that we look forward to working with the State, global funders, other NGOs and patient-led groupings in efforts to improve health outcomes and we commit to positively working with the new MEC.

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