

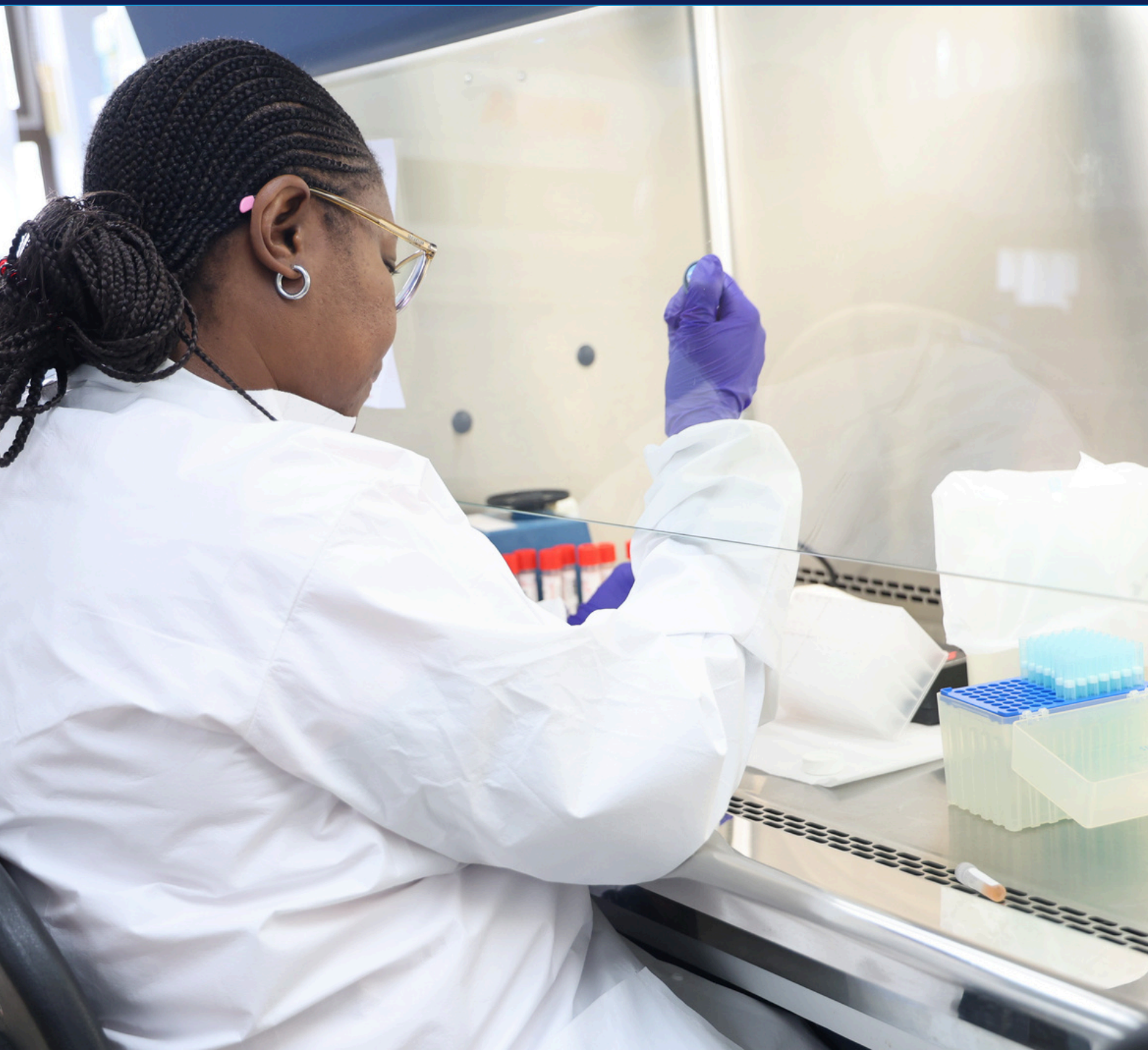


World Health
Organization

South Africa

Newsletter

Quarter 4 | October - December 2025



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Message from

Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi
Country Representative
WHO South Africa



As we close the year, we reflect on a quarter that reaffirmed health as central to development, equity and resilience.

From the G20 Leaders' Summit held on African soil for the first time to continental dialogue on health financing and workforce transformation, South Africa has helped shape critical global and regional conversations. Health was clearly positioned not only as a moral imperative, but as a strategic investment underpinning economic stability and social protection.

Nationally, we saw meaningful progress in bringing care closer to people. The launch of Six-Multi-Month Dispensing for antiretroviral therapy marked an important step toward more dignified, people centred HIV services. World AIDS Day in Limpopo renewed collective commitment to ending AIDS, while continued engagement on diabetes, mental health and universal health coverage reinforced the need to protect people from financial hardship and strengthen primary health care.

Our collective work during the last quarter of 2025 also strengthened the foundations of resilient systems. Through collaboration with the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, rapid response training, safeguarding initiatives, and regional action on neurological disorders and cervical cancer elimination, we advanced preparedness, integrity and accountability in health and emergency operations. Across all these efforts, one message stands out. Progress is possible when leadership, evidence and partnership align.

As we look to the year ahead, WHO remains committed to supporting South Africa to advance universal health coverage, strengthen health security, and build equitable, sustainable health systems that leave no one behind.

I extend my sincere appreciation to government counterparts, partners and the dedicated WHO team for their continued collaboration and commitment.

Together, we move forward with determination and purpose.



Presidents in a family photo during the G20 Leaders' Summit

WHO at the G20 Leaders' Summit: Advancing Global Health Solidarity

The World Health Organization played an active role in high-level engagements surrounding the G20 Leaders' Summit in Johannesburg—the first time the Summit was held on African soil reinforcing health as a cornerstone of global development, equity and resilience.

Representing WHO, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus engaged Heads of State, ministers and partners to underscore that investment in health systems, primary health care and pandemic preparedness is not only a moral imperative, but fundamental to economic stability, social protection and global security. His engagements also highlighted South Africa's leadership within the G20 and its commitment to solidarity, equity and stronger health systems.

Ahead of the Leaders' Summit, the Director-General participated in the Global Fund Replenishment meeting, where more than US\$11.3 billion was pledged to accelerate the fight against HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, and to strengthen global health security.

WHO's engagement at the G20 reaffirmed its commitment to working with governments, civil society and international partners to advance universal health coverage, health security, and the social and environmental determinants of health critical priorities that intersect with water, sanitation, climate resilience and sustainable development.





**Bridging Africa's Health Financing Gap
in a Changing Geo-Economic Context:
Challenges & Potential Solutions**

29 SEPTEMBER - 03 OCTOBER 2025
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA



Delegates during the launch of the 2025 Africa Integration Report, held on the margins of the 8th AU Specialized Technical Committee Ministerial Session on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration in Johannesburg.

Advancing Domestic Health Financing Ahead of G20

African Ministers of Finance and Health met in Johannesburg for the 8th AU Specialized Technical Committee, placing health financing at the centre of Africa's economic agenda ahead of the 2025 G20 Summit.

Leaders committed to strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, advancing innovative financing, and progressing toward the 15 percent Abuja Declaration target.

Representing WHO, Shenaaz El-Halabi underscored the urgency of prioritising health in national budgets and reducing reliance on external funding.

The meeting reinforced Africa's unified voice, positioning health as a strategic investment for growth, stability and resilience.



From left: South Africa's Minister of Finance, Hon. Enoch Godongwana in a handshake with Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi, WHO South Africa Country Representative.

42 Countries Strengthen Safeguarding in Health and Emergency

Representatives from 42 African countries, alongside the World Health Organization and partners, convened in Pretoria for the African Strategic Conference on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Misconduct in Joint WHO–Member State Health and Emergency Operations, reaffirming a collective commitment to safer, people-centred health responses across the Region.

The four-day conference brought together senior government officials, WHO leadership and safeguarding experts to strengthen systems that protect communities and health workers during health and emergency operations. Opening the meeting on behalf of South Africa’s Minister of Health, Dr Percy Mahlathi, Deputy Director-General for Hospital Services and Human Resources, emphasized that safeguarding is fundamental to quality health care and requires strong leadership, accountability and sustained commitment.

Discussions focused on embedding the prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) into emergency preparedness and response.

Participants examined survivor-centred and trauma-informed approaches, safe reporting mechanisms, risk assessments, crisis communication and accountability tools to strengthen readiness and trust during emergencies. Delivering the keynote address, Christian Saunders, UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, underscored that sexual misconduct represents a profound breach of trust and called for proactive, system-wide action.

On behalf of WHO, Shenaaz El-Halabi reaffirmed the Organization’s commitment to supporting Member States to build safeguarding systems rooted in integrity, accountability and dignity.

The conference concluded with agreement to develop a regional action plan to strengthen and harmonise safeguarding practices across Africa.



Some participants from the Member States and WHO team during African Strategic Conference on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Misconduct.



Mr Christian Saunders, Under-Secretary-General and Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse addressing Member State during the conference.

Renewed Commitment to End AIDS

South Africa marked World AIDS Day 2025 in Limpopo with a renewed call for collective action to end AIDS, bringing together national leadership, communities, civil society, people living with HIV, and partners under the theme “Renewed Efforts and Sustainable Commitments to End AIDS.”

Led by Paul Mashatile, Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, the event underscored the country’s determination to sustain progress while accelerating prevention, treatment literacy and community-led responses. Addressing the gathering, the Deputy President emphasized that ending AIDS requires shared responsibility, noting that renewed urgency and sustained commitment are essential to ensure that prevention, treatment and support reach every community, leaving no one behind.

The Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, reflected on South Africa’s progress in expanding access to life-saving treatment, while stressing that the work is far from over. He highlighted the need to strengthen treatment literacy, prevention and continuity of care to protect gains made and move decisively toward ending AIDS as a public health threat.

The World Health Organization joined government and partners in reaffirming its support for South Africa’s HIV response. Shenaaz El-Halabi, WHO Representative in South Africa, noted that World AIDS Day is a powerful reminder that progress is possible when leadership, communities and evidence come together, reaffirming WHO’s commitment to supporting people-centred and equitable HIV services across the country.



Deputy President Paul Mashatile delivering his keynote address during the World AIDS day in Limpopo.



Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi (WHO South Africa Country Representative) speaking to the press on HIV/AIDS response during the World AIDS day in Limpopo.



Dignitaries interacting during the World AIDS day in Limpopo.

South Africa Launches 6-Month ART Dispensing

For many people living with HIV, a clinic visit can mean lost income, long travel, transport costs and fear of stigma. In the Free State, that reality began to shift as South Africa officially launched the 6-Multi-Month Dispensing (6MMD) model allowing stable patients to collect six months of antiretroviral treatment in a single visit.

The launch, attended by Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister of Health, national and provincial leaders, partners, civil society and communities, marked a significant step toward more people-centred HIV services. By reducing the frequency of clinic visits, 6MMD eases pressure on health facilities while giving patients greater dignity, choice and continuity of care.

Speaking at the launch, Dr Motsoaledi emphasized the human impact of the shift, "Six-month dispensing is about dignity and access. It allows people living with HIV to receive the care they need while getting on with their lives, and it strengthens our health system to focus where care is needed most."

The World Health Organization has long recommended multi-month dispensing as a proven approach to improve retention and treatment outcomes. WHO has supported South Africa through policy alignment, technical guidance and capacity-building to ensure the safe and effective rollout of 6MMD nationwide.

Shenaaz El-Halabi, WHO Representative in South Africa, noted, "This launch reflects South Africa's leadership in translating evidence into action. Multi-month dispensing brings care closer to people, improves treatment continuity, and supports a more efficient and resilient health system."

With the world's largest HIV treatment programme, South Africa continues to demonstrate how innovation and strong leadership can turn evidence into meaningful change for people and communities.



Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi (WHO South Africa Country Representative) delivering an address during the 6MMD launch in Free State.

Partnership in Action: WHO Regional Director Visits South Africa

From 19–23 October 2025, WHO's Regional Director for Africa, Dr Mohamed Janabi, undertook an official mission to South Africa, bringing together national leadership, WHO teams and partners around a shared agenda.

A central moment of the mission was a courtesy call on the Minister of Health at the National Department of Health in Pretoria. Discussions with senior officials focused on strengthening collaboration on health system resilience, primary health care and emergency preparedness, while reaffirming a shared commitment to sustaining South Africa's leadership in regional health security and innovation.

The visit also highlighted the full continuum of care and the value of science-led public health. At Steve Biko Academic Hospital, Dr Janabi visited the Nuclear Medicine Research Infrastructure (NuMeRI) — a centre of excellence advancing innovation in diagnostics, research and training.

At community level, Dr Janabi visited the FF Ribeiro Clinic, a model primary health care facility providing essential services. By interacting with health workers and patients, the mission team gained first-hand insight into service delivery, referral systems and patient care integration — reinforcing primary health care as the foundation for improving outcomes for all.



From left: Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister of Health with Dr Mohamed Janabi, WHO's Regional Director for Africa during the courtesy meeting.

Inside WHO, the Regional Director held an interactive engagement with staff, encouraging focus and optimism during organisational restructuring and reaffirming an open-door approach and support for teams delivering results in South Africa.

Partnership building featured throughout the programme. Through the Strategic Leadership Forum 2025 and the 2gether4SRHR supported by Sweden, WHO joined other UN agencies to reaffirm joint efforts to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights across the region.

The mission further included a pre-meeting on the establishment of a National Public Health Institute, and the official opening of the International Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA) 2025, linking national priorities with regional collaboration.

Across these moments, the message was consistent: when leadership, evidence and partnership align, progress accelerates — in South Africa, and across the African Region.



During his visit to FF Ribeiro Clinic in Pretoria, Dr Mohamed Janabi met with health workers to discuss strengthening primary health care.



Dignitaries during a facility tour and patient interaction at the 6MMD launch in Free State.



From left: Mr Solly Nduku, Chairperson of Civil Society and Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi (WHO South Africa Country Representative) during the 6MMD launch in Free State.



Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi (WHO South Africa Country Representative) delivering an address during the Diabetes Summit in Pretoria.

Strengthening South Africa's Diabetes Response

WHO South Africa joined government, health leaders, researchers, civil society and partners at the 2025 Diabetes Summit to strengthen collaboration in addressing one of the country's fastest-growing health challenges. The Summit was officially opened by Dr Joe Phaahla, Deputy Minister of Health, signalling strong political commitment to accelerating action on diabetes and noncommunicable diseases.

In his opening remarks, the Deputy Minister of Health underscored the urgency of collective action, noting that tackling diabetes requires more than clinical care alone. He emphasized the importance of prevention, early detection and sustained access to care, while calling for stronger partnerships across sectors to reduce the growing burden of diabetes and its impact on families, communities and the health system.

The Summit provided a vital platform to share progress, exchange experiences and chart a way forward for improved diabetes prevention and management. It brought together policymakers, clinicians, researchers and people with lived experience, reinforcing the need for solutions that are practical, inclusive and centred on people's everyday realities.

Addressing participants, Shenaaz El-Halabi, WHO Representative in South Africa, highlighted that diabetes sits at the heart of the broader NCD crisis, stressing that progress is possible when evidence, leadership and community action align. She reaffirmed WHO's commitment to supporting South Africa through policy guidance, strengthened primary health care, improved surveillance



As discussions unfolded, the Summit reinforced a shared message: addressing diabetes is both a health and development priority.

Through sustained leadership, innovation and collaboration, South Africa continues to advance a response that puts people at the centre and turns commitments into meaningful impact.

From left: Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi (WHO South Africa Country Representative) and Dr Joe Phaahla (Deputy Minister of Health) lead an exhibition during the Diabetes Summit



From right: Dr Joseph Mwangi (WHO South Africa NCD lead) taking dignitaries through an exhibition during the Diabetes Summit

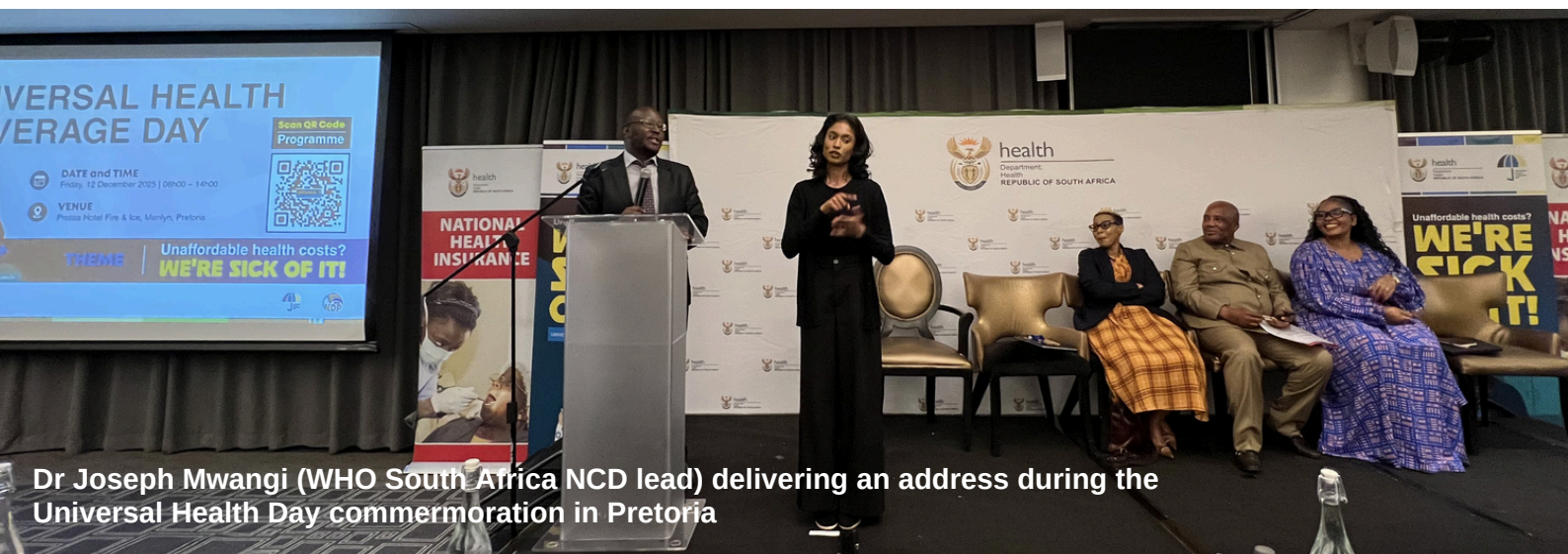
“We’re Sick of It”: South Africa Marks UHC Day 2025 with a Call for Affordable Care

South Africa commemorated Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day 2025 under the global theme “Unaffordable health costs? We’re sick of it!”, bringing renewed focus to the financial burden that health care places on individuals, families and communities.

The commemoration was led by Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister of Health, who underscored that universal health coverage is fundamentally about protecting people from financial hardship while ensuring access to quality health services. No one should be forced to choose between seeking health care and meeting basic household needs, reaffirming government’s commitment to strengthening public health financing and advancing reforms that promote equity and affordability.

Representing the World Health Organization, Dr Joseph Mwangi, WHO South Africa’s NCD Lead, noted that UHC is central to improving health outcomes across the life course. He highlighted that reducing out-of-pocket payments, strengthening primary health care and addressing noncommunicable diseases are critical to ensuring that health systems serve people effectively and sustainably.

The UHC Day commemoration served as a reminder that achieving universal health coverage is not only a health goal, but a social and economic imperative that requires sustained leadership, strong partnerships and policies that put people first.



Dr Joseph Mwangi (WHO South Africa NCD lead) delivering an address during the Universal Health Day commemoration in Pretoria



Some WHO South Africa team at the UHC Day commemoration in Pretoria

Putting Mental Health at the Centre of Care

South Africa marked World Mental Health Day at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, with a strong call to strengthen accessible, inclusive and stigma-free mental health services.

The commemoration was led by the Deputy Minister of Health Dr Joe Phaahla and the Gauteng MEC for Health, Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko, underscoring high-level political commitment to mental health.

As part of the programme, leaders conducted a walk-through of the psychiatric ward, engaging directly with patients and health workers and reinforcing the importance of dignity, compassion and quality care.

Powerful testimonies from people with lived experience of mental health conditions were central to the day, offering stories of recovery and resilience and reminding participants that mental health policies must be grounded in real human experiences.

Representing the World Health Organization, Dr Joseph Mwangi emphasized that mental health is an essential component of universal health coverage, calling for stronger integration of mental health into primary health care and sustained efforts to address stigma.

The commemoration reinforced a shared message: progress depends on listening to lived experience, strengthening frontline services, and placing mental wellbeing at the centre of health care.



Dignitaries during a facility tour of the mental health ward at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital on World Mental Health Day.



WHO South Africa team received at the NICD lab during the facility tour

Strengthening National Disease Surveillance and Preparedness

WHO South Africa, led by the WHO Representative, met with Professor Adrian Puren, Executive Director and senior scientists of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) to strengthen collaboration across shared priorities for disease surveillance, preparedness and response.

The discussion reaffirmed the value of close coordination between WHO and South Africa's national public health institutions to ensure timely, evidence-informed action during outbreaks and other health emergencies. It also highlighted the importance of sustaining strong partnerships that connect scientific expertise, operational readiness and national policy priorities.

Several practical areas for closer collaboration were identified. A key focus was improving linkages between WHO's strategic health information priorities and NICD's data and analytics capacity, with the aim of strengthening real-time evidence for decision-making and outbreak response.

The meeting also explored joint resource mobilization, identifying pathways through various partners and contributors to support health security and health systems broadly. Looking ahead, WHO and NICD will continue building on the existing partnership to ensure that South Africa's technical expertise continues to inform national, regional and global health priorities.



Government leaders and WHO officials displaying the 10 Competency Based Curricular at the launch

Building a Job-Ready Health Workforce for Africa

South Africa hosted the launch of WHO AFRO’s first Prototype Competency Based Curricula, marking a major step toward strengthening health workforce readiness across the continent.

Developed for 10 priority health professions and supported by The Global Fund, the curricula shift from theory based training to practical, competency driven learning aligned with real service delivery needs.

The initiative supports the Africa Health Workforce Agenda 2035 and aims to build resilient, responsive health systems.

The launch brought together government leaders, academic institutions and partners, reflecting strong commitment to modernising health education. The curricula will be adapted and rolled out across countries to ensure a confident, capable and job ready health workforce for Africa’s future.



Ms Shenaaz El-Halabi (WHO South Africa Country Representative) delivering her remarks during the Competency Based Curricular launch

World Cervical Cancer Elimination Day

For the first time, the world marked World Cervical Cancer Elimination Day, shining a spotlight on a disease that remains one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths among women despite being preventable and curable when detected early.

To mark the day, the World Health Organization team joined experts from across Eastern and Southern Africa in Cape Town to take stock of progress on cervical cancer elimination, with a strong focus on HPV vaccination, screening and treatment scale-up. The meeting brought together programme managers, clinicians, researchers and partners to share country experiences, review progress and identify practical actions to close gaps in prevention and care.

Discussions emphasized the urgency of reaching women and girls with life-saving services, particularly those in underserved communities, and strengthening health systems to deliver integrated, people-centred care.

The convening reaffirmed the Region's commitment to translating global targets into national action moving closer to a future where no woman dies from cervical cancer.



Experts join to mark the first World Cervical Cancer Elimination Day in Cape Town.



Delegates in a group photo during the IGAP conference in Johannesburg.

Building Momentum for Epilepsy Care Across Southern Africa

The World Health Organization convened an Intercountry Learning Workshop on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Disorders in South Africa, bringing together delegates from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa to accelerate implementation of the Intersectoral Global Action Plan (IGAP).

urgency of accelerating IGAP implementation, noting that more than four million people in the African Region live with active epilepsy, many without timely diagnosis or treatment. She underscored the importance of intersectoral collaboration, integration of services into primary health care and sustained political commitment.

Opening the workshop, Shenaaz El-Halabi, WHO Representative in South Africa, emphasized the need to translate global commitments into practical action that improves access to care, reduces stigma and strengthens health systems to respond to neurological conditions as a public health priority.

Contributing from the regional level, Dr Chido Rwafa-Madzvamuse highlighted the

Across the three-day workshop, participants reviewed progress, shared country experiences and identified priority actions to strengthen prevention, diagnosis, treatment and long-term care. The engagement reaffirmed countries' collective commitment to advancing IGAP and improving quality of life for people living with epilepsy and other neurological disorders across Southern Africa.



From left: Dr Joseph Wamala (WHO South Africa EPR Team Lead) demonstrating infection prevention and emergency response procedures during Rapid Response Training in KwaZulu-Natal,

Enhancing Outbreak Preparedness in KwaZulu-Natal

World Health Organization, in partnership with South African National AIDS Council and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, conducted a Rapid Response Training to strengthen outbreak preparedness and emergency response at provincial and district levels. Supported by the Pandemic Fund, the week-long training brought together health workers and response teams for hands-on learning through simulations, drills and practical exercises. Participants strengthened skills in outbreak detection, coordination, infection prevention and control, and emergency response operations.

The training focused on real-world scenarios, enabling teams to test systems, improve coordination and build confidence to respond swiftly and effectively to public health threats. By investing in frontline capacity, the initiative supports South Africa’s efforts to strengthen preparedness, protect communities and build more resilient health systems. The training underscored the importance of sustained collaboration between government, partners and health workers to ensure faster, more coordinated responses when emergencies occur.

Acknowledgements

WHO South Africa sincerely thanks our government counterparts and partners for their gracious and steadfast support. Your collaboration and contributions help us promote health, provide essential technical support and protect communities across South Africa.



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