

To

Dr Keith Cloete

HoD

Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness

Dear Dr Cloete.

Re: Civil Society concerns re the implementation of recent TB policies in the Western Cape

The Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness draft implementation plan for the National Strategic Plan on HIV, TB and STIs (2023-2028) emphasises that “Urgent attention must be given to the rapid implementation of scale-up of TB prevention interventions, including Targeted Universal TB Testing (TUTT) and TB Preventive Therapy (TPT).”

On behalf of Civil Society, we would like to raise our concern regarding the implementation of these TB policies in the Western Cape.

The following is noted / highlighted:

1. The Western Cape DoH and Wellness TUTT policy (circular H64/ 2023), was released on 24th May 2023.
2. Following discussions with various stakeholders, including primary healthcare providers, it would appear that circular H64/ 2023 is not being actively promoted or implemented in the Western Cape. There has been limited training on TUTT and health workers in primary care facilities do not appear to be aware of the TUTT policy and are not being supported to ensure policy implementation.
3. The *National Guidelines on the Treatment of TB Infection* which provide recommendations on TB Preventive Treatment (TPT) were published in February 2023. The Western Cape DoH has yet to issue a circular to make it possible to implement this national policy in the Western Cape. There appear to be numerous bureaucratic delays (between committees such as PPTC, OPEXCO etc), with little transparency regarding what the concerns are, so that 9 months after the national policy was published, there is still no action.
4. The National Guidelines on the Treatment of TB Infection recommend the use of the 3HP regimen for all eligible groups, including close TB contacts. This requires the use of rifapentine. There are stocks of donated rifapentine in the provincial pharmacy depot. The stock will be expiring, and it would seem that there have been requests to give it to other provinces e.g. Limpopo. This would be a big missed opportunity for the Western Cape to play a leading role in the national TPT rollout.
5. The Western Cape DoH held a day-long engagement and consultation meeting with Civil Society and NGOs on 17th November 2023. At the meeting, Civil Society representatives raised serious concerns about the accountability of the WC DoH to key stakeholders, including people with TB in the WC and NGOs working to strengthen TB care. The urgent implementation of TB policies is a civil society priority and presents an opportunity to strengthen this relationship in the interest of improving TB prevention and care.
6. The citizens of the Western Cape have the same right to quality TB care as do South Africans living in other provinces that have implemented the 2023 National guidelines related to TUTT and TPT.

Civil society organisations call for a response to this letter, including an action plan for the following priorities:

- The release of the WC TPT circular, including the use of rifapentine (for the 3HP regimen option) to be made available to all close TB contacts: By 31 Dec 2023.
- A training plan for health workers providing TB services in the WC on the updated TPT guidelines: By 31 Jan 2024.
- Training of WC health workers providing TB services on TUTT: By World TB day, 24 March 2024.

- The Implementation of a community awareness campaign to increase demand for TPT and TUTT: By World TB day, 24 March 2024.
- Reporting on TPT and TUTT implementation on the WC TB dashboard: By World TB day, 24 March 2024.

Signed by:

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TB Accountability Consortium SA (TBACSA)
Rural Health Advocacy Project (RHAP)
Treatment Action Campaign (TAC)
TB HIV Care
Desmond Tutu TB Centre (DTTC)
Free of TB
University of Cape Town- Centre for Lung Infection and Immunity