

Govt to amend Tobacco Act to promote healthy lifestyles

By [Vivian Warby](#)

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The Health Portfolio Committee is to hold hearings on amendments to the Tobacco Control Act to further enhance the control of tobacco products and promote healthy lifestyles.

Addressing a Social Cluster briefing on Monday, 5 May, Health Minister Manto Tshabala-Msimang said amending the Bill was part of the Department of Health's "healthy lifestyles" campaign, which seeks to encourage South Africans to adopt and practice healthy lifestyles as part of decreasing the burden of disease facing the country.

The hearings, which will take place on Wednesday and Thursday, seek to amend the Act to be in line with the international standards set in the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Increase penalties and prohibition of promotion

The amendment Bill she said included "strengthening sections which prohibit advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and the regulation of smoking in public places."

Minister Tshabala-Msimang said the amended Bill would also introduce picture-based health warnings as well as the removal of misleading descriptions such as "mild" and "light" which carries a fine of R1 000 000.

"The Bill increases the penalties so that they become a real deterrent against contravention of the Act.

"The fine for the owner of a public place or employer who fails to ensure that there is no smoking in a smoke free area has been increased from R10 000 to R50 000," the minister said.

The penalty for selling tobacco products to a minor (under 18 years) has been increased from R10 000 to R50 000.

Also included are new offences such as failing to protect employees from tobacco smoke pollution, selling tobacco products in a health institution and retailer not complying with point of sale conditions.

The penalty for advertising and promotion has been increased from R200 000 to R1 000 000.

Encouraging healthy living

This was part of the department's approach in dealing with comprehensive health care which looks at health promotion,

reduction of communicable and non-communicable diseases and the unnatural causes of death such as accidents and injuries.

Besides the amendments to the Tobacco Control Act in its drive toward healthier lifestyles for all South Africans, the department was also increasing the number of health promoting schools from 3500 to at least 5000 schools.

These schools have initiated the programmes to prevent tobacco use, development of food gardens and sports participation.

Malaria control

Speaking about malaria meanwhile, the minister said the department was encouraged by the fact that Limpopo and Mpumalanga had already covered over 85% of malaria risk areas with indoor residual spray for malaria vector control while KwaZulu-Natal was currently at 82%.

She said developing and implementing malaria health promotion activities in the three affected provinces was underway.

Establishing TB tracers

“In line with the call by the President in the State of the Nation Address, we are working on reducing the TB defaulter rates from 10 to 7% through the establishment of TB tracer teams and the training of 3000 health personnel in the management of this disease.

“A total of 72 TB tracer teams have been established in all the nine provinces,” the minister said.

Each team comprises a healthcare worker, two community health workers and a data capturer. In addition, 122 healthcare workers were trained on MDR-TB management in the past two months.

HIV/AIDS support grows

On HIV and AIDS, the minister said treatment, care and support intervention was gradually gaining momentum in line with the department's commitment to deal with this challenge.

“As at February 2008, our figures show that at least 456,000 had been initiated on antiretroviral treatment and 39,759 of these are children in all 407 facilities accredited to provide this service.

“We now have 86% of the sub-districts having at least one service point accredited to provide comprehensive care to people living with HIV and AIDS.”

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ABOUT VIVIAN WARBY

Vivian Warby is a senior freelance journalist for Bizcommunity.com in Cape Town. She can be contacted on wordwarrior@mweb.co.za.
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