

Dis-Chem teams with Ezintsha to enhance access to HIV prevention

Dis-Chem has added its support to a project driven by Ezintsha, a multidisciplinary research centre and a division of the Wits Health Consortium, dedicated to HIV prevention through Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).



Source: Dischem

The project is designed to increase the awareness, availability of, and access to PrEP as a means to address the high rate of HIV prevalence in South Africa.

According to recently published estimates from Thembisa, a mathematical model of HIV in South Africa, about 7.8 million people, or 13.2% of the population, were living with HIV in South Africa in 2022. PrEP is a combination of anti-HIV medication that keeps HIV-negative people from getting HIV.

The project specifically targets HIV-negative males and females above 18 years of age who identify themselves to be at high risk of acquiring HIV. Dis-Chem, one of the pharmacy groups partnering with Ezintsha, is running the project at two of its Dis-Chem pharmacies - Wonderboom and Hammanskraal- giving peri-urban consumers greater access to HIV prevention medicine.

The partnership sees Ezintsha funding nurse and doctor consultations and the required blood test and medication for qualifying patients, within Dis-Chem's existing clinic infrastructure, while Dis-Chem's clinics provide a holistic treatment

offering to the patients, including medication for PrEP side effects and other allied health needs such as access to contraception, screenings and treatment for STIs.

Furthermore, Ezintsha ensures that research assistants who are trained HIV counsellors, are on hand at each store to provide friendly assistance and guidance to individuals seeking support.

The Department of Health (DoH) is also providing vital information on the significance of PrEP, including who can take it, why individuals are encouraged to take it, how to take PrEP correctly, and what oral PrEP is.

Strategic approaches for HIV prevention

Angela Tembo, pharmacy project lead at Ezintsha states that, "To meet the UNAids' target to end HIV/Aids by 2030, we need to have different approaches to ensure that negative people stay negative.

"Having this project in pharmacies is exciting for us as pharmacies are often a first port of call for people seeking healthcare in South Africa and have a role to play in HIV prevention due to the sheer number of people that access emergency contraceptives and STI treatment.

"This project allows us to build evidence on pharmacy-delivered PrEP and will help contribute towards South Africa's PrEP coverage among high-risk women and men."



Launch of initiative to end Aids in children by 2030

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Joha-Nita Jordaan, Dis-Chem clinic divisional manager, emphasised the significance of this project, stating, "It is crucial to reduce HIV-positive numbers in South Africa, and this project aims to do exactly that. Our goal is to benefit those at risk, including individuals repeatedly exposed to HIV, those with HIV-positive or unknown-status partners, those with multiple sexual partners, individuals with recent STIs, and those requiring Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) repeatedly.

"Our existing clinic network, designed to provide integrated primary healthcare to our customers and communities, is ideally positioned to support Ezintsha's important research into HIV and PrEP.

"We are pleased to be able to add value to this initiative and to play a role in empowering individuals with knowledge, access to preventative measures, and a supportive environment, to contribute to a healthier future for our community," concludes Jordaan.

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