

# Student wellness programme launched in Ulundi

PRETORIA: Over 4,000 students at Mthashana Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College in Ulundi are set to benefit from a general health and wellness programme...



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Supported by the provincial Health Department and Higher Education and Training HIV/Aids (HEAIDS) Programme, the *First Things First* campaign is devoted to promoting education and awareness around HIV, TB, STIs and other related health and social factors.

The programme ensures that information and access to products such as condoms and services for testing, prevention and treatment are available within the higher education and training sector to promote overall good health.

Launched by the Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, Mduduzi Manana, on Monday, the initiative will also benefit the families and the broader community of Mthashana.

Manana said healthy and productive graduates are one of the cornerstones of a healthy economy.

"Universities and colleges provide the ideal environment within which to improve knowledge about HIV, other STIs and TB, and to promote testing and other services to protect and care for young people," said Manana.

Statistics indicate that over half of the world's young population infected with HIV lives in Eastern and Southern Africa.

KwaZulu-Natal has the highest new HIV infection rate of the nine provinces in South Africa and the highest overall prevalence of infection (16.9%), according to the SA National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey, 2012.

In KZN, 12% of youth in the 15-24 age group are HIV positive, followed by Mpumalanga (10%) as the second highest. Limpopo's youth in the same age bracket have the lowest prevalence (3.1%).

Worryingly, the same most-at-risk group has also been decreasing the use of condoms, which increases the risk of HIV infection.

The 2015 *First Things First* drive is being activated across 429 campuses within all public TVETs and universities to reach out to a student population of two million.

"We each have one responsibility above all others; firstly, it is to ourselves. Our sector is in a unique position to lead a movement that achieves this from the inside, as well as through links with all other spheres of South Africa," said Manana.

Last year, *First Things First* helped over 100,000 young people learn their HIV status and use this as a stepping stone to protect their health. Students received screening and treatment for STIs and TB, according to HEAIDS Director Ramneek Ahluwalia.

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