

FOREWORD

At a glance gender issues appear to have been firmly established within the overall framework of the public health sector in South Africa. Firstly, there are on-going initiatives within the Department to change both the gender and race balance for senior management appointments. Furthermore, the Department is progressively creating enabling environment for its women staff members as well as women decision-makers. In relation to health policy, decisions had been taken to provide free primary health care to all. This policy has been implemented with some measure of success. In addition, laws have been enacted which enable women, including young women, to obtain termination of pregnancy at public health facilities. The implementation of *Batho-pele: White Paper on the Transformation of Public Service Delivery* ensures and promotes patients' rights, constructively addresses abuses of women clients, and is more responsive to gender-specific problems such as violence against women. Historically, the Department of Health (pre-democratic government) hardly paid any attention to gender equality or gender equity, let alone in the public health arena. Therefore, measures outlined in this document are significant positive advances in health policy for all citizens of the Republic of South Africa.

It is acknowledged that however innovative these measures are, they are not sufficient to achieve real and meaningful gender equality and gender equity within the South African public health system. It is also acknowledged that in many instances, gender issues have not been considered in the process of other policy development and service implementation. Consequently, the ability of the health service to address widespread gendered problems such as violence against women remains limited. The understanding of health workers of how gender norms affect their clients' health and health seeking behaviour is also limited. Thus, health workers' responses, health promotion activities and health interventions may well be inadequate in addressing the needs of these clients.

The Department of Health recognises these intricate factors and seeks to address them. The Department accepts that legislation alone cannot transform the health system. The Department also acknowledges that transformation is a national effort that requires the concerted contributions of all members of the South African society. For this reason, we have developed these Gender Policy Guidelines. These guidelines will help us maintain our focus and will strengthen the impetus for much needed change. It is envisaged that the process of gender mainstreaming in the health sector would be undertaken by:

- ensuring the development of strategies to integrate gender in all policies and planning for the whole sector;
- reviewing departmental policies to ensure that they are in line with the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality;
- putting in place systems for monitoring and evaluating progress of the implementation of policies and programmes; and
- establishing mechanisms to liaise with organisations in civil society

The process for developing the guidelines involved close collaboration between staff of the Department of Health and stakeholders from large numbers of civil society organisations. Some of them participated in the consultative workshops whereas others provided valuable input by commenting on the draft documents circulated. They are: Cluster managers, Heads of Units, Provincial Heads of Health, Provincial GFPs, OSW, Professional Organisations, Organised labour, Educational Institutions and NGOs.

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