

1. FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER

This annual report of the National Department of Health draws a curtain on the financial year 2008/09, which was the final year of the 2004-2009 term of office of Government. It accounts for the performance of the national department against the strategic plan for 2008/09-2010/11, during the first year of implementation.

The report reflects the key milestones achieved by the department in its quest to improve the health status of South Africans, through the delivery of accessible, caring and good quality services. Most importantly, the report also reflects the department's limitations and constraints encountered during the reporting period, which will have to be addressed going forward. It is of critical importance that we learn equally from our achievements, as well as from our oversights and limitations.

Service volumes in the public health sector increased notably during the year under review. Access to primary care services, as measured by headcounts, increased from 106 623 648 in 2007/08 to 117 341 256 in 2008/09. The national primary health care utilisation rate increased from 2,2 visits per person per annum in 2007/08 to 2,4 visits per person in 2008/09. Although this figure was lower than our target of 3,5 visits per capita, it reflects positive and encouraging trends. Higher activity levels were also recorded at district hospitals, with hospital separations increasing from 1 567 590 in 2007/08 to 1 692 969 in 2008/09. Separations at regional and tertiary hospitals also reflect slight increases between 2007/08 and 2008/09.

Our strategic health programmes also reflect steady improvements. Our immunisation coverage has increased from 85,2% in 2007/08 to 88,8% in 2008/09. Our tuberculosis (TB) control programme reflects a steadily improving cure rate, from 57,7% in 2005 to 62,3% in 2006, and to 64% in 2007. A total of 781 465 South Africans living with HIV and AIDS were initiated on antiretroviral treatment (ART) in 2008/09, reflecting a 38% increase from the 483 084 people who were on treatment in 2007/08. A total of 734 409 people living with debilitating conditions were provided with nutritional support.

The trust that South Africans have placed in the public health system cannot be betrayed. We will spare no effort in ensuring that the public health sector continuously enhances the quality of the services it offers.

At a legislative level, key pieces of legislation were processed through Parliament in 2008/09 to promote public health and to strengthen the functioning of the health system. These include the Medicines and Related Substances Bill and the Tobacco Products Control Amendment Bill, which were passed by Parliament. The Medical Schemes Amendment Bill and the National Health Amendment Bill were tabled in Parliament.

Co-operation on health matters was also fostered with several neighbouring countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU). These include agreements signed with Namibia, Cameroon, Burundi and Malawi. This is quite significant, since diseases do not comply with any geographic or political boundaries.

Diverse challenges and constraints confronted the department in 2008/09, which impacted negatively on its performance in several areas. Due to resource constraints, the *South African Demographic and Health Survey*

(SADHS) 2008, which is the source of official information on health outcomes in South Africa, was not conducted. This work has now been carried into the next financial year.

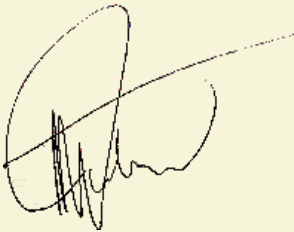
Policy proposals for the implementation of the Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD) for doctors, dentists, pharmacists and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel were finalised, but funding issues could not be resolved. These matters are now being settled in the new financial year, with additional support from the national fiscus.

I will also be very forthright and indicate that the department has received a qualified audit opinion from the Office of the Auditor-General (South Africa) for 2008/09, for reasons outlined later in the report. All these factors provide us with an important baseline to work from.

As we leap forward into 2009-2014, we do so filled with a deep sense of appreciation of the challenges that lie ahead. These include overhauling a health system that has at best produced mixed outcomes, and converting it to a well oiled machinery that meets the health needs and expectations of South Africans who depend on it. This transformed health system must steer the country towards the attainment of the health related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Many health workers and managers throughout the country dedicated themselves to improving service delivery in 2008/09. Their efforts are acknowledged. As we begin to turn around the health system, their commitment to enhancing the health and social well being of all South Africans will be paramount.

My gratitude also goes to the Director-General of the Department of Health, Mr T D Mseleku, as well as to all provincial Members of the Executive Committee (MECs) for Health who steered the ship during 2008/09.



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MINISTER OF HEALTH
DATE : 15 September 2009