

Wits RHI's New Programme to Prevent School Based HIV and GBV

JOHANNESBURG, 8 April, 2019 -- Wits RHI is proud to announce the launch of a USAID-funded five year (2018 - 2023) School Based HIV and Gender Based Violence (GBV) Prevention Programme. Wits RHI will work directly with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to reduce the incidence of HIV, tuberculosis (TB) infections and violence among in-school adolescent girls and boys, aged between 9 – 19 years, across five provinces in South Africa.

Dr Saiqa Mullick, Director of Implementation Science at Wits RHI, on the programme said, “We, at Wits RHI, are excited to have received this award as it comes at a critical time when the incidence of HIV infection and GBV among in-school adolescents continues to be alarmingly high. This grant will enable us to work hand in hand with the South African Government to support their efforts to ensure that schools are hubs of safety, link young people to relevant services and support, as well as guarantee that we focus on our most vulnerable youth.”

In South Africa, approximately 2000 new HIV infections occur among AGYW weekly.¹ This high HIV incidence among AGYW is due to several factors including declined knowledge of HIV prevention methods; increased risky behaviours; early sexual debut; and low HIV testing.²

Safety and violence in schools is also of great concern with data showing more than a third of AGYW had experienced sexual violence before the age of 15 years, and a third of the violence that occurred in schools was perpetrated by peers.^{3,4}

The programme will reinforce linkages to care and create referral pathways to ensure effective linkage to care to the comprehensive package of services as outlined in the Integrated School Health policy. This approach will be strengthened by capacitating district and school based support teams. This mechanism will be complemented by layering with district support partners implementing APACE, orphans and vulnerable children, gender based violence and prevention (pre-exposure prophylaxis) partners as well as South African government sectors to ensure capacity building and sustainability.

The model supports the approach of a multilevel and multi-sectorial program underpinned by enhanced M&E and adaptive programming. Achieved through a layering of interventions at the district level and enhancing and leveraging the She Conquers platform (organizations working in unison to ensure comprehensive coverage of interventions), this approach is more likely to sustain prevention efforts over time than any single intervention.

On the technical approach, Nicolette Naidoo, Chief of Party and Programme Head, Implementation Science, Wits RHI, said, “These multi-level interventions make sure that we are addressing risks at the individual level, influencing context, making schools safer, as well as increasing access to adolescent and youth friendly health services and psychosocial support. At the same time, we will be engaging and educating key influencers such as heads of departments, life orientation specialists, educators and parents.

The success of this programme hinges on the collaborative efforts of SAG sectors (DBE, Department of Health and Department of Social Development), USAID implementing partners and key beneficiaries. We

¹ Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), *UNAIDS Data 2017*. 2017.

² HSRC, 2008.

³ Nelson Mandela Foundation Annual Report 2017/2018.

⁴ Unpublished GAP Year baseline data

hope to see a more coordinated response in the development and implementation of policies that target the health, education, safety, and psychosocial needs of adolescents.

The programme aims to reach 177,367 female and male learners in all primary and secondary schools in prioritized education districts, as well as 11,176 educators, parents, SBST and health facilities to ensure linkage to care and quality, adolescent and youth friendly health service provision. It will be implemented in six provinces and seven districts namely: Gauteng Province – City of Johannesburg (Region A, E, D & G); KwaZulu Natal Province – eThekweni and King Cetshwayo; Mpumalanga Province – Ehlanzeni, Gert Sibande; Free State – Thabo Mofutsunyane; and Western Cape Province - City of Cape Town.

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