

First Dedicated Clinics to Open for Transgender Care under Key Populations Award

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The Wits RHI Key Populations Programme is the successful recipient of a 5-year USAID Award for advancing the South African HIV Response for Key Populations, Sex Workers, and Transgender individuals. Sex workers and transgender individuals remain marginalised in public healthcare. In South Africa, between 40 percent and 88 percent of sex workers are HIV positive¹. Transgender women globally are 50 times more likely to be HIV positive than the general population². This award will change the status quo for key populations in South Africa through increasing access to health care and enhancing competency of health service providers to tailor responses to their needs.

The award builds on the achievements of the Wits RHI Sex Worker Programme, which has rendered services to over 10, 000 sex workers over the last decade. “We plan to expand our healthcare package to address more comprehensively the needs of sex workers in relation to mental health and substance abuse. We will diversify services at our sites and partner with other organisations, including those who work with the children of sex workers”, said project lead Naomi Hill.

The opening of four dedicated transgender clinics in Eastern Cape (Port Elizabeth, East London), Western Cape (Cape Town) and Gauteng (Johannesburg) will be a first for South Africa, which has no identified network providing gender-affirming health care. Hill commented, “We will work hand-in-hand with trans men and women to address gaps in service delivery and create health services that the community is comfortable using.”

Wits RHI is proud to partner with SWEAT (Sex Work Education and Advocacy Task Force), Sisonke Sex Worker Movement, BroadReach Healthcare, HIV Clinicians Society, and a range of community partners to implement activities in eight districts across four provinces. The activities will include providing fixed and mobile clinics and community peer-led outreach programs. Services to prevent HIV transmission in high-risk populations include health information products, HIV testing and counselling, distribution of male and female condoms, and oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). HIV positive clients will receive antiretroviral therapy (ART) and adherence support. The clinics will also provide primary health care, family planning, Tuberculosis screening, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. Clinics serving the trans community aim to provide hormones for gender transitioning.

About Wits RHI:

The Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute (Wits RHI) is a leading African research institute focusing on HIV, sexual and reproductive health and vaccine preventable diseases. It is the largest research institute of the University of the Witwatersrand and has contributed to health policies in South Africa. It is also a Medical Research Council-collaborating centre, a World Health Organization-collaborating centre, as well as a United Nations Population Fund strategic partner.

¹ SAHMS Final Report, Survey on female sex workers in South Africa 2013-2014, <http://www.anovahealth.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/SAHMS-Report.pdf>

² Baral SD, Poteat T, Strömdahl S, Wirtz AL, Guadamuz TE, Beyrer C. (2013), Worldwide burden of HIV in transgender women: a systematic review and meta-analysis, *Lancet Infect Dis.* 2013 Mar;13(3)

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