

THE SOUTH AFRICAN TB RECOVERY PLAN 3.0 AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY LEADERS

Tuberculosis (TB) is an airborne disease that is preventable and curable.

Yet, TB killed 54 000 South Africans in 2023 and is a leading cause of infectious death in South Africa (WHO 2023).

The National Department of Health aims to fight TB through implementing the **TB Recovery Plan**, which outlines the most important actions needed to end TB in our communities. Community members play an important role to help prevent people getting sick from TB and supporting those with TB to be cured. **You have a key role to play in this.**

There are 3 priorities of the National Department of Health's TB Recovery Plan (Version 3.0) which Community Leaders can assist with:



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1. Raise awareness to increase

TB testing and prevention according to the Targeted Universal TB Testing (TUTT) policy and TB Preventive Therapy (TPT) guidelines

The following groups of people are at higher risk of getting TB, and should have a sputum test for TB done, even if they don't have any TB symptoms:

1. People living with HIV (PLHIV) should be tested once every year,
2. All close TB contacts of a person diagnosed with TB in the previous 3 months need to have a TB test,
3. People treated for TB in the last 2 years should be tested once a year for 2 years.

There is now medication called TB Preventive Therapy (TPT) to protect people from getting TB disease. All people at risk for TB should get tested for TB, and:

- If they test positive, they must start TB treatment without delay.
- If they test negative, they should take TPT for protection against getting sick with TB.

Another way to prevent TB is to implement TB Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) e.g. opening windows, wearing a mask.

The TB guidelines were only recently updated to include the need for TB contacts to be tested, therefore, it is important to highlight this change when giving educational TB talks.

What can you do to help increase TB testing?

- **Co-host a TB awareness day** about the need for TB testing on World TB day (24 March) or World AIDS day (1 Dec) at your local clinic. Partner with different sectors, including social development, religious leaders, community leaders, clinic committee representatives and civil society. Invite a TB survivor to share their personal story of having TB to help make the idea of TB more real for people and to reduce TB stigma.
- **Engage with community health workers** to increase their knowledge about the TUTT policy to reach households at risk and in this way increase TB testing.
- **Support people to do self screening** via the HealthCheck app.



What can you do to help prevent TB?

- **Discuss with facility / clinic staff how to overcome barriers to people starting TPT** and see what support they need to reach out to patients and in communities.
- **Give educational talks at the clinic and in the community** to promote IPC and TPT
- **Hand out flyers about IPC and TPT** at community events.
- **Engage with community members to raise awareness** about who should take TPT and why TPT is important.



2. Engage with the health facility/ clinic to monitor TB testing and prevention

The Department of Health set targets for TB testing in each district.

City of Cape Town: 341 211

Cape Winelands: 94 331

Central Karoo: 8 585

Garden Route: 68 265

Overberg: 25 498

West Coast: 54 376

What can you do?

- **Partner with clinic committee representatives to review TB data each quarter.** This data could be obtained from the online dashboard and clinic TB registers. If the number of people who got tested for TB is too low, set up a meeting with the facility managers in partnership with the clinic committee members to brainstorm how to increase TB testing, with clear plans for community engagement. Ask about the number of people started on TPT - these numbers should increase over time. If there is no increase, discuss what the challenges are with the staff in the clinic.



- **Reach out to local NGOs to organise mobile vans** for TB testing in your community.



3. Support efforts to help people finish their course of TB treatment

Raise awareness about TB stigma, and the importance of supporting people with TB while taking treatment, which takes 6 months for most people.

What can you do?

- **Talk to TB survivors and people in peer support groups to understand their TB journeys better.** Many things can influence whether a person gets diagnosed with TB, starts treatment and finishes the whole 6 months. The challenges include lack of food, no money, problems at work and sometimes substance use (alcohol and drug use). Use community meetings and health facility feedback systems like the complaint boxes to advocate for quality counselling for each person with TB, as well as referrals for nutritional support, psychological support and social support, where needed, to promote person-centred care.
- **Engage with the social worker, professional nurse and TB Room staff to explore ways of improving quality of counseling** e.g. TB peer support groups, TB survivor-led talks in the waiting room.