

<b>MEDIA RELEASE</b>	PSA concerned by deafening silence from Department of Health over collapse of South Africa's HIV programme
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned with recent revelations regarding the collapse of South Africa's HIV programme. The largest HIV treatment programme in the world is unravelling, and the government's absence in addressing this crisis is alarming.

The abrupt suspension of foreign development assistance, including the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), has led to the closure of NGO-led clinics, stockouts of antiretrovirals (ARVs), and mass retrenchments of healthcare workers. Urgent action and strategic intervention are urgently needed to prevent new infections, sickness and deaths. The PSA calls for immediate government action to restore and strengthen the HIV programme. There is a need for reprioritisation and provision of adequate budgeting to ensure the continuity of the programme lest the country faces a health crisis. Hiding in the sand and downplaying the effects of the funding withdrawal is not the way to go, it is clear that the impact of this action is massive. It must be noted that many of the affected NGOs supported the Health Department in critical areas such as testing, HIV prevention, and technical support. This disruption equally affects the research work which is accompanied by job losses which will adversely affect the health system and economy of the country.

The PSA urges the Health Department to prioritise the reinstatement of funding and resources to ensure uninterrupted access to HIV treatment and prevention services. It is imperative that government steps up to address this crisis and prevent further deterioration of public health. Prior to the suspension of American funding, the Minister of Health had announced a plan to get an additional 1.1 million people on treatment by the end of the year, which obviously will remain just a dream owing to budgetary challenges. What is more concerning is the numbers provided by a study commissioned by the Health Department which projects between 56 000 and 65 000 additional deaths, and 150 000 new infections in just three years owing to the funding withdrawal.

Furthermore, TB experts predict that 580 000 lesser people will be screened while 35 000 lesser people will be on treatment this year. The government must urgently explore possible partnership with international stakeholders to mitigate the risk associated with the fund's withdrawal as the health and well-being of the South Africans should be prioritised. The country needs Billions of Rands to keep the HIV programme running and achieving set goals hence the call to provide leadership.

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