
Dear University Students across South Africa,

As the new academic year commences, and in lieu of the various challenges that face returning and new students, I urge you to read the message below, which might well assist you in addressing some of the social and health challenges associated with academic life.

We know that these are many and thus I want to pause for a moment to not only make you aware of them, but to also remind you that appropriate support and services are available to you if and when you need them.

Let us all take a moment to reflect on the social challenges and challenges regarding health and wellness that you face on a daily basis. We know that these are many and thus I want to pause for a moment to, not only make you aware of them, but to also remind you that support and services are available if and when you need.

The HIV epidemic has caused significant loss of life and has affected almost all of us over the past few decades. Whilst we have made significant progress in the past few years, we still have more than 270 000 new HIV infections every year with an estimated 2 000 new infections in adolescent girls and young women each week in South Africa. Thus it's important that you look after your sexual and reproductive health and make sure that you practice safer sex and also get tested, remember that TB and STIs is also a challenge, so screen and know your status. Our Health Clinic and the First Things First Programme provides all these testing, screening and treatment services throughout the year at no cost to our students.

Unplanned pregnancies are high in number and will affect your educational outcomes, make sure that you are prepared for any eventuality and protect yourself. The responsibility is yours alone. Let's not let it compromise your educational outcomes.

We are aware that our students face difficult financial challenges that leave our female students in particular, vulnerable to transactional relationships with older men or even engaging in sex work. Often these relationships result in violence, diseases like HIV and other harmful Sexually Transmitted Infections. I urge you to empower yourself through education, information and awareness programmes. You must be in a

Directors: M Price (Chairperson), A Bawa, M Mabizela, T Mayekiso, H Ntlaleng, N Phaswana-Mafuya, D Tromp, SZ Zungu, R Ahluwalia (CEO)

position to know that your rights are being violated and to ask for help. These short term gains must not compromise a beautiful future that lays ahead of you post completing your studies.

We know that many young people experience some form of gender based violence while studying at institutions of higher learning and are often faced with mental health challenges, which leads to increasing rates of suicides on campuses across the country. This is a reality of South Africa that is often not acknowledged. Again, I urge you all to become aware and know your rights and where to turn should you need help. I urge again to all our students to respect each other's rights and dignity at all times.

We know that as your orientation week is starting at your universities and TVET colleges across the country, you will be faced with a lot of social activities that often involve drinking alcohol. You might even be offered other forms of drugs. Long hours at the library and the pressure of performing in your studies might leave you thinking about taking drugs to keep you awake for longer and increase your productivity. Let me remind you that all kinds of substances – alcohol, drugs, and performance enhancing medication, is going to compromise your health and well-being in the meantime. So I would like to urge all of you to possibly refrain from all this, drink responsibly, take care of your health and make use of the services that are offered to you in the case that you feel like you have a problem with substance abuse.

Again, I want to re-iterate that we are aware of these many challenges, we hear you and also understand that these are often exacerbated by financial challenges as well.

We want to encourage all of you to focus on your studies and refrain from engaging in risky sexual behaviour or relationships that leave you vulnerable and places you at risk. Ask for help and report situations that may result in your fellow students getting the help that they may need.

Together with our Campus Health Services, Support Services and the HEAIDS Programme through all its programmes including First Things First, we are fully committed to ensuring that our students across all TVET colleges and universities take care of their health and wellness and have a successful academic year.

You will through your orientation programmes, become familiar with these services and the HEAIDS Programme, we invite all students to participate in programmes and would like to encourage them to get to know their HIV and health status, as we believe that a healthy student contributes to a healthy society.

Thanking you for your attention and wishing all of you a successful academic year 2018.

Vice Chancellor, we hope that this message will leave your students inspired to take care of their health and wellbeing.

To keep you informed- as part of an increasingly comprehensive Health, Wellness and Youth empowerment programme in the higher education and training sector, HEAIDS implements numerous programmes focussing on Women and Men Empowerment; Gender based Violence, LGBTI Rights and empowerment; Substance Abuse Prevention; HIV-Curriculum integration; Radio and Social Media among other programmes for all our students and staff across all our institutions:

Thanking you once again for your commitment and support to HEAIDS.

Kind Regards



Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia

Chief Executive Officer

HEAIDS (Higher Education and Training Health Wellness & Development Centre)