



higher education  
& training

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



HIGHER HEALTH

Higher Education & Training: Health, Wellness and Development Centre

## **INDUCTION MESSAGE:**

(For general information and inclusion in your institution correspondence with students)

Many students will be attending a tertiary institution for the first time. Many of these students would have struggled to get here. Research shows that about 50% of students in South Africa, are the first people in their immediate families to attend a university, and without adequate support, they feel alone and anxious about meeting their family expectations while navigating the unknown environment ahead of them.

Underpinning the student journey are the many health risks and social challenges that communities face daily: high rates of HIV and TB, rampant crime and gender-based violence, continuing drug and alcohol abuse, unplanned pregnancies and mental health issues coupled with emerging pandemics like Covid-19 and other micro-organisms that continue to threaten our survival on the continent.

This is the reality we face, and it is bound to cause a fair amount of heartache, anxiety and some degree of fear.

The youth of South Africa are vulnerable to a series of epidemics, and these have been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Here are some relevant statistics.

- Tuberculosis remains the leading cause of death among the youth, followed by HIV. It is estimated that over 8 million South Africans still live with HIV in South Africa with the new infections predominantly emerging within the young people between 15-24 years of age.
- Diabetes is increasing among young people, and about one in five have hypertension.
- Many students, according to Higher Health studies, become pregnant while on campus, and 75% of these pregnancies are unplanned.
- About six in 10 students and staff have been found to abuse alcohol regularly.
- Mental health issues are affecting young people increasingly, and 75% of these cases happen before the age of 24. One in five young South Africans live with mental health challenges, according to the WHO.
- A Stellenbosch University study showed that one-fifth of University students experience a mental disorder.
- The risk of rape among women in SA is 45%, compared to a global average of 35%.

- Sexual gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence are amongst the most prevalent forms of GBV in young women aged 16-25 years (UNICEF).
- The Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector is home to more than 2,5 million youth, with 51% being females. 10% Of all reported rape cases originate from young women in the higher education sector. Sadly, only one in ten women report a rape case.

With support from Higher Health together with our universities, TVET and CET colleges along with our thousands of volunteers trained as Higher Health peer educators and our frontline workers, we can help our students with facing health and psycho-social challenges , so that they can achieve their academic aspirations and take their rightful places in society.

The three-step health and psycho-social wellbeing interventions provided by Higher Health entail the following:

**ONE:** Please help us reach out to the first-year students to encourage them to enrol for the Higher Health Civic Education and Health Skills Programme, available through your campus, which offers health, safety and wellness resources and runs alongside the academic programme.

**TWO:** Please help us to encourage more and more young students to use the Higher Health early assessment and risk screening tools for early detection of diseases like HIV, TB, STIs, Sexual Reproductive Health, mental health, Covid-19, social challenges like GBV risk-screening, drugs, and alcohol, among others for early detection and linkage to support services.

**THREE:** Please encourage the students to consult campus health professionals, counsellors, psychologists and make use of the

**HIGHER HEALTH TOLL-FREE 24-HOUR CRISIS HELPLINE - 0800 36 36 36.**

Being in a novel environment gives rise to exciting feelings of liberty and space, but also exposes students to the risk of **Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**. Numerous initiatives are in place across all South African tertiary institutions to implement policies and build capacity and infrastructure to ensure greater safety of all students and staff. As Higher Health, we are raising awareness of gender rights, gender equality and preventive behaviours and measures through the **HIGHER HEALTH Civic Education and Health Skills Programme** and campus peer-to-peer programmes.

This is backed by user-friendly self-administered GBV risk assessments which particularly target first-year students. Doing the assessments empowers the individual to identify risk factors, relationship challenges and behaviour that makes them more vulnerable. Once they identify the dangers, know how to spot toxic masculinity, understand the difference between positive and abusive relationships, they are better able to take precautions and seek the physical and psychosocial support they may need.

We have through Higher Health and our GBV Technical Task Team, released the following necessary guidelines and protocols for our institutions to follow:

- Implementation Procedural Guidelines on Sexual and Gender Related Misconduct which sets out the procedures for reporting and handling complaints, issues of anonymity and confidentiality, as well as to guide implementation and compliance at institutions.
- Implementing Protocols on Rape and Sexual Assault which has been developed to guide the institution through the steps required to offer support to victims of rape and sexual assault.
- Implementation Protocol on the Code of Ethics that details what the responsibilities of student leaders and staff are, and how to ensure that contractors and third parties adhere to the GBV Guidelines, as well as campus safety, protection on outreach/field visits, whistleblowing, staff student relationships, drugs and alcohol policy.
  
- Protocol on Campus Safety and Security Minimum Standards;
- the Protocol on Safety in Private Accommodation;
- the Protocol on Safety in Residences; and
- Protocol on Staff-Student Relationships.

These interventions recognise that GBV isn't just a "women's problem": without the efforts of men and boys too, we'll never put a stop to GBV.

The next area we need to talk about is **mental health**. One of the unexpected benefits of the COVID-19 pandemic was a breaking of the silence surrounding mental health, clarity about the urgent need for student services, and the mobilisation of resources to meet this need. Enrolment in the HIGHER HEALTH Co-Curriculum and participation in peer-education sessions is where students and staff will be able to access information and help anytime.

In addition, every student should be aware of the 24-hour, free, multilingual **HIGHER HEALTH TOLL-FREE 24-HOUR CRISIS HELPLINE - 0800 36 36 36** that offers immediate advice and further linkage to services such as psychologists to individuals who are struggling with anxiety, depression, family or relationship issues and other trauma or stress.

Further, **HIV, TB and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)** are still a major threat to student's health that impact on their ability to sustain and complete studies. These will remain a keen focus of Higher Health campaign and services, including the First Things First campus health and wellness days that happens every month throughout the year. Students should take advantage of these health activations to access health promotion information and referrals to off-campus services,

testing/screening and sexual and reproductive health products including condoms, pregnancy tests, contraception, HIV-prevention medication PrEP and treatment for HIV or TB.

Lastly, coming into a new environment frequently exposes students to social networks that feature **alcohol and drugs**. We want to ensure that all campus communities know that these substances hugely increase other risks – not only poor academic or work performance, but also diminished physical safety from sexual and gender-based violence, unplanned pregnancies for women, HIV and other STIs, and various mental strains and disorders

We hope that this communiqué is of value and look forward to further engagement and collaboration with you during 2024, as we undertake these exciting and innovative programmes. We will keep you informed of further developments as they unfold.

May I take this opportunity to wish you and your organisation everything of the best for a successful and prosperous 2024.

Sincerely,

**Dr (Prof) Ramneek Ahluwalia**  
**CEO: HIGHER HEALTH**