

To: Stakeholders
From: Prof (Dr) Ramneek Ahluwalia, CEO of HIGHER HEALTH
Subject: 2023 HIGHER HEALTH Student Health Civic and Psycho-social Wellbeing Induction and Orientation Message
Date: 24 January 2023

PURPOSE OF THIS COMMUNIQUE

This document aims to provide information that can be used by the leadership of post schooling education and training sector (PSET) institutions as part of their induction engagements with first year and returning students, incoming and all other staff, parents, guardians and other stakeholders. It addresses the health, psychosocial wellbeing, social challenges like GBV, drugs, alcohol and substance abuse, civic education, safety and human rights as well as other development topics that are relevant to young people and those working in the sector. We appeal to all campus communities to make use of this information and key HIGHER HEALTH programmes, interventions, policies, protocols and services for our students and staff so that together we can ensure that 2023 is a healthy, safe and prosperous academic year.

We have taken the liberty to also draft an induction and orientation message that you can use within your own speech or communications should you deem fit.

The document has two parts:

1. A background of HIGHER HEALTH programmes, interventions, policies and services available for the first-year students, staff at campuses.
2. A 2023 Induction Message that one can use as part of your Induction Speech or Communique that covers a wide spectrum of important data on health and social challenges impacting our young students, as well as informing them of the help and support services available on campus.

BACKGROUND

At the start of this academic year the PSET can look forward to a less interrupted and more contact-learning, on-campus based interaction with first-year intakes and all students. That being said, we return to campuses as a new, possibly the most transmissible to date COVID-19 subvariant, XBB.1.5, spreads across the world, reminding us that the pandemic is still with us and demanding vigilance and action. We urge institutions to continuously request all students and staff who are not vaccinated to do so or to enrol for boosters in line with government policy. There is, however, no need for panic, as the illness due to infections with this subvariant appears mild.

We believe that it is crucial to inspire success through improving health and wellbeing among all our institutional communities. The frequently difficult transition from childhood to adulthood comes

into sharp focus for students especially those attending tertiary institutions for the first time. This journey is filled with possibility and potential, but also obstacles and challenges.

So, on behalf of the millions of tertiary students who benefitted from the services facilitated by HIGHER HEALTH in 2022, I would like to thank you for your support and collaboration over a hugely successful year.

This cooperation and partnership has allowed us to extend the positive impact we made on students significantly in 2022. We enrolled more than 714 000 students on our extramural HIGHER HEALTH civic, health and wellness Second Extra -mural Curriculum that runs alongside the academic curriculum across all our campuses countrywide. This interactive programme with participatory pedagogy of 'each one reach one teach one' covers a wide spectrum of topics including gender equality/diversity and GBV, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, HIV, drugs and alcohol, civic values and 10 key soft skills (conflict management, leadership, teambuilding etc.) required in the workplace.

HIGHER HEALTH is grateful to 14 000 institutional peer educators across all campuses countrywide who volunteer their time and energy to be trained to support fellow students on all HIGHER HEALTH programmes. Equally we appreciate the over 50 000 frontline workers (campus security, residence wardens and house mothers, student support services, SRCs, health and social workers, among others) who work in various institutions with HIGHER HEALTH to implement protocols, procedures and guidelines and address challenges that face our sector.

We are proud that last year, some 753 000 young students across our sector were linked to various youth-friendly health, wellness and mental health services, including through our mobile clinic fleet, campus clinics and other support services across all campuses in South Africa.

Through our peer-to-peer engagements, the introduction of the gender curriculum and other support service programmes for victims and survivors, we saw over 6 221 young students in our PSET – which is a vastly increased number of individuals – break the silence and report incidents of gender-based harassment, intimate partner violence including GBV, asking for early psychosocial and support interventions. They received counselling and other assistance, many through the **HIGHER HEALTH TOLL-FREE 24-HOUR CRISIS HELPLINE - 0800 36 36 36** - which is a real, tangible resource to any student in need. We want to thank institutional psychologists and other teams who are part of these valuable services.

Despite these interventions, the youth of South Africa continue to face many risks and challenges. After three years of the Covid-19 pandemic, health, social and economic conditions continue to pose a risk to students' sense of security, mental condition and social integration. Ensuring that students complete their studies successfully, coupled with civic education and the adoption of civic values, along with addressing issues of health, wellness and psycho-social development for a holistic graduate remain a top priority to safeguard the future of our youth, and the future of South Africa.

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We will continue to address Covid-19, other established youth epidemics and challenges, and will be devoting attention to nurturing civic values and gender equality and all the while striving to eliminate toxic masculinity that drives South Africa's high rate of GBV.

In the year ahead we will be redoubling our efforts to enrol students into our extramural HIGHER HEALTH civic, health, wellness and development curriculum; assess and screen individual students through our confidential platforms; and work with vulnerable youth to provide health support and services that address their specific needs and risks.

HIGHER HEALTH, in partnership with Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) will from this year have its **HIGHER HEALTH Extra-Mural Civic and Health Curriculum** accredited as a formal NQF Level 5 certificate. This will provide our graduates with an additional civic and health skills certification that will further assist towards our goal of building a holistic graduate in preparation for the workspace and for their future healthy life and our healthy economy.

Over the next years, HIGHER HEALTH continues to put emphasis on conducting national research programmes using technology and innovation tow within the sector.

INDUCTION MESSAGE

Many students will be attending a tertiary institution for the first time. It may have taken a hard struggle to get here. Research tells us that about 50% of students are the first people in their immediate family to attend a university. This entails high expectations, and many students may be feeling alone and anxious about coping with the unknown territory ahead of them.

On this journey, many of us know at least one person who is impacted by 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.

- 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.
- A large number of students, as per HIGHER HEALTH studies, become pregnant on campus, and 75% of these pregnancies are unplanned.
- About six in 10 students and staff have been found to abuse alcohol regularly.

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- 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 as per WHO.
- The risk of women experiencing rape in SA is 45%, compared to a global average of 35%.

With support from HIGHER HEALTH together with our universities, TVETs 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 health and psycho-social challenges they may face, so that they can achieve the academic aspirations and take their rightful place 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 towards encouraging them to enrol within the HIGHER HEALTH Extra-Mural Civic and Health Curriculum available across your campus, which offers health, safety and wellness resources and runs alongside the academic programme.

TWO: please help us to encourage the 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 use access to campus health professionals, counsellors, psychologists and 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 Extra-Mural Civic and Health Curriculum** and campus peer-to-peer programmes. This is backed by user-friendly self-administered GBV risk assessments which particularly target first-years. Doing the assessments empowers the individual to identify risk factors, relationship challenges and behaviour that makes them more vulnerable. Once they know what the dangers entail, how to spot toxic masculinity, what is the difference between positive and negative, abusive relationships, they are better able to take precautions and seek physical and psychosocial support they 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. The guidelines also present supportive and protective measures that the institutional responsible office need to put in place from the moment a complaint is made and guide on Informal and formal procedures available to the complainant and how to conduct these.

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- 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 which is a signing-on document 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.

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. Many factors contribute to the emergence of toxic masculinity, including patriarchy and the experience of young boys to their male role models. Men are the predominant users of violence against women and are also the predominant authors of murder and victims of it.

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 Second Curriculum and participation in peer-education sessions is where you 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. This number could become very important in your lives, or in the life of someone you know. When things get really tough, when you feel that you need some support urgently, this is your connection to professional, confidential support.

Considering the rising threat posed by the new Covid-19 Omicron sub-variant, Kraken, the policy work undertaken by HIGHER HEALTH since 2020 to develop sector guidelines continues to be of relevance. We urge you all to familiarise yourselves with the protocols released by HIGHER HEALTH in order to protect and safeguard yourself from the potential harm of Covid-19. Following government policy, we will continue to urge all staff and students to be vaccinated in order to prevent infections and time away from campus. The second valuable tool to use is HIGHER HEALTH's daily digital screening platform, "HealthCheck". It reduces long lines at campus health facilities and allows health officials to detect and identify outbreaks on campus quickly, so it protects all students, not only those who register for screening.

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 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.

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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 pregnancy for women, HIV and other STIs, and various mental strains and disorders. It is upon us to protect our campus and our residences to be safe by taking responsibility of not abusing drugs and alcohol during this critical time in the post-school tertiary education system.

We hope that this is of value and look forward to engagement and collaboration with you during 2023 as we undertake these exciting and innovative programmes, and 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 2023.

Sincerely,



Dr (Prof) Ramneek Ahluwalia
CEO: HIGHER HEALTH

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