

Drive for more ARVs for expectant moms

04 Nov 2011 | Anna Majavu |

A NEW health advisory committee says the government must increase the number of pregnant women on anti-retroviral treatment by almost 400% in the next two years.



Only 22% of pregnant women with a CD4 count of under 350 are on anti-retroviral treatment - but this must be increased to 80% by 2014, according to a report compiled by the committee.

The committee also wants 85% of all people living with both HIV and TB to be put on anti-retrovirals - up from the 20% now.

The total number of people on anti-retrovirals must be increased from 1.1million to 2.5million by 2014.

The committee also expects Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi to make sure the average life expectancy increases by two years by 2014. This would mean an average life expectancy for men of 56 years and 61 years for women.

The committee's deputy chairwoman, Debbie Bradshaw of the Medical Research Council, warned that the number of women dying in childbirth was increasing.

"We are very clear that it is going in the wrong direction and that interventions to slow that down are really important," Bradshaw said.

At the launch of the health data advisory and coordination committee's first report yesterday in Cape Town, Motsoaledi said he accepted the new ambitious set.

The targets might "look daunting" but because the government had already planned to increase the number of people on anti-retrovirals by 500000 a year, Motsoaledi was confident he would meet the targets.

"This report will move us forward away from confusing and contradictory data," he said.

Before the report was released, government had been "swimming in confusion" with different agencies ranging from the Department of Home Affairs to Statistics SA generating vastly different health statistics.

One agency had put the maternal mortality rate at 140 per 100000 live births, while another said 625 women out of every 100000 died in childbirth.

The government had been forced to present the higher figure at a recent meeting of the World Health Organisation to avoid being accused of deception, he said.

The advisory committee was formed a year ago after statistician-general Pali Lehohla lodged a complaint with cabinet about the poor quality of health data in the country.

It is made up of academics, government officials from Treasury and the Financial and Fiscal Commission, and representatives of the private healthcare sector and will be advising Motsoaledi on how to improve the public health system ahead of the launch of the National Health Insurance.

Motsoaledi said he was not ready to name the 10 pilot sites where the NHI will be tested. The audit of long queues, drug stockouts, attitudes of staff and the state of buildings was still being conducted at 4200 health facilities countrywide.

<http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2011/11/04/drive-for-more-arvs-for-expectant-moms>