

SpotlightNSP media responses to IMPACT BP questions

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Provided by Foster Mohale, Spokesperson, National Health Department

Questions and responses:

-Hypertension (or high blood pressure) overall is poorly controlled in the country, and comes with a high risk of stroke, heart disease or renal failure. Currently, what are the national plans for improving strategies for blood pressure management and treatment in the public health sector?

The National Department of Health (NDoH) has several ongoing strategies to strengthen the prevention, early detection, and management of hypertension within the public health system. Hypertension management is guided by the Adult Primary Care (APC) clinical decision-support tool and the Standard Treatment Guidelines and Essential Medicines List (STGs/EDL), which ensure that evidence-based treatment protocols are consistently applied across all levels of care.

Antihypertensive medicines are included in the Essential Medicines List and are therefore available at primary health care (PHC) facilities, ensuring equitable access to treatment nationwide. The Department continues to work with provincial health departments to strengthen medicine supply chain systems and address occasional stock-outs through improved forecasting and procurement practices.

In addition, the NDoH is intensifying early screening and linkage to care through community-based initiatives, improved patient monitoring at PHC level, and the integration of hypertension care into other service platforms such as HIV, TB, and maternal health. This aligns with the National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2022–2027, which prioritises hypertension as one of the key NCDs requiring population-wide interventions.

-Results from the IMPACT-BP study, published in September found within the study population that home-based hypertension care delivered by community healthcare workers led to a significantly lower mean systolic blood pressure at 6 months when compared to standard of care, which is based in a clinic. Has NDoH been made aware of these results?

Yes, the NDoH is aware of the IMPACT-BP study results. Both the NDoH and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health participated in the workshop where the study team presented the findings, which demonstrated improved blood pressure control among participants receiving home-based hypertension care by community health workers compared to standard clinic-based care.

-If so, in what way is NDoH coordinating with the study team to potentially roll out an intervention of this nature to improve blood pressure control? Please provide as much detail as possible.

The Department is engaging with the research team to explore the potential integration of the IMPACT-BP model into existing national initiatives. The study used community health workers (CHWs) to deliver home-based hypertension screening and follow-up, which aligns closely with the Department's community-based screening and linkage to care campaign launched in KwaZulu-Natal on 1 March 2024.

This national campaign mobilises CHWs and Traditional Health Practitioners (THPs) to screen for blood pressure and diabetes at household level as part of the first phase. Both CHWs and THPs have been trained and equipped with point-of-care testing devices, including blood pressure monitors and glucometers.

To date, this campaign has been rolled out in six of the nine provinces, and by 2029 it is expected to be operational in all 52 districts of the country. The Department is using the lessons from the IMPACT-BP study to strengthen monitoring, referral pathways, and patient follow-up mechanisms within this community-based model of care.

-The study provided participants in the intervention arms with blood pressure cuffs in order to monitor their own blood pressure. Is there a potential scope for NDoH issuing tenders for the procurement of blood pressure cuffs at a large scale to provide to patients or at the very least community healthcare workers to allow for improved monitoring of blood pressure?

There is already a national tender in place to procure the blood pressure cuffs and we have already started procuring them together with glucometers for CHWs and THPs. We will be doing so incrementally as we train more and get more funding to do so.

There is already a national transversal tender in place for the procurement of blood pressure cuffs and glucometers for use by CHW and THPs. Procurement has already begun, and devices are being distributed incrementally in line with the scale-up of training and availability of funding.

This phased approach ensures that CHWs and THPs are properly trained in device use, patient education, and data reporting to enhance the accuracy and sustainability of home-based monitoring and linkage to PHC services.

-If not this particular intervention, what are some ways that NDoH is considering adjusting hypertension care or management approached to potentially improve blood pressure control?

Beyond this specific intervention, the Department is pursuing several complementary approaches to strengthen hypertension prevention and management. These include:

- Expanding integrated screening for hypertension and diabetes across PHC and community platforms.
- Improving adherence support through the Central Chronic Medicine Dispensing and Distribution (CCMDD) system, allowing stable patients to collect medication closer to home.
- Strengthening health worker capacity through APC-based training, continuous professional development, and supportive supervision.
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems to track hypertension control rates at facility and district level.

These efforts aim to improve detection, treatment adherence, and long-term control of blood pressure across the continuum of care.

-Is there anything else you would like to add?

Explain that besides screening in communities we are also running awareness campaigns to improve overall health and wellbeing of South Africans through prevention focusing on risk factors for NCDs. Include all other info relating to radio and TV campaigns and partnership with ParkrunSA.

In addition to community-based screening, the Department runs extensive health promotion and awareness campaigns aimed at improving the overall wellbeing of South Africans and reducing risk factors for non-communicable diseases. These campaigns highlight the importance of healthy eating, physical activity, avoiding smoking and alcohol abuse and regular screening for hypertension and diabetes.

Communication initiatives include radio and television messages, community dialogues, and partnerships with civil society and private sector organisations such as Parkrun South Africa, which promotes regular physical activity as a key component of NCD prevention. These efforts form part of the Department's broader strategy to empower individuals and communities to take proactive steps towards healthier lifestyles and to reduce the growing burden of hypertension and other NCDs in the country.