

# Media alert: Ritshidze data reveal friendlier services for some & denial of services for others in Eastern Cape clinics

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19 September 2023, 10am	Ritshidze Community Meeting for Buffalo City	Braelyn
21 September 2023, 10am	Ritshidze Community Meeting for OR Tambo	Ikwezi

Sign up for live stream: <https://bit.ly/RitshidzeEasternCape2023>

On 19 September 2023, Ritshidze will launch a detailed report into the state of the public healthcare system in the Eastern Cape. **The third edition of the report reveals a number of improvements like shorter waiting times and staff being more friendly on the whole — however staff remain hostile to key populations and people who are late for appointments, and many reports emerged of people being denied services for not having a transfer letter, ID, or being a key population.**

Ritshidze data from two districts in the report will be presented to the department of health and other duty bearers at two district-level community meetings during the week. The report is based on the results of data collected through [Ritshidze's community-led monitoring](#) of 46 health facilities in the province, as well as data collected through interviews with 1,607 key populations in the community.

This is the third edition of the Eastern Cape State of Health report; the [first was published in September 2021](#), and the [second in September 2022](#). Data in this report were collected between July and August 2023. Like the earlier editions, the third edition identifies challenges that discourage people from going to the clinic for HIV, TB, and other health services.

## Key issues found include:

- + **Refused services without a transfer letter or ID, or for being a key population:** In the last year a staggering 503 people told us they had been denied services because they did not have a transfer letter — something that is not required to start or restart your ARVs, and 294 people had been denied services without an identity document. Key populations we interviewed had also been denied services: including 4% of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men, 20% of people who use drugs, 25% of sex workers, and 21% of trans people.
- + **Waiting times have reduced:** Positively, average waiting times have reduced over the last year, down to 3:14 hours waiting in the facility. However, 55% of people still reported long waiting times — with 63% blaming staff shortages, 34% blaming staff not working/working slowly, and 18% blaming disorganised filing systems. Loadshedding adds to delays as staff cannot find files in dark filing rooms, and only 39% of facilities have a generator.
- + **Not enough PLHIV getting 3 month supply of ARVs:** One strategy to reduce waiting times and ease congestion is for people who are just collecting medicines to get a longer supply of medication. This simply means less trips back to the clinic. Positively the number of people reporting a 3 to 6 month ART refill has increased this year, up to 46%. While this is a welcome improvement, compared to 71% in Mpumalanga, and 80% in other PEPFAR supported countries, the Eastern Cape is still lagging behind. Some districts like Buffalo City and Amathole are performing the best in the country, while others have fallen far behind.

- + **More people could be using pick-up points:** Another strategy is to go straight to a pick-up point to collect ARVs. Yet 70% of people using facility pick-up points told us that they must still collect files, take vitals, and see a clinician before getting their parcel — adding unnecessary delays. Of those still using the facility, 59% said they had never even been offered the option to collect from a pick-up point — and 49% wish they could collect their ARVs closer to home.
- + **Improvement in staff attitudes overall, but key populations & people living with HIV still face hostile treatment:** 74% of public healthcare users thought that clinic staff were always friendly and professional, a major improvement from only 55% last year. In contrast, only 33% of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men said staff are always friendly, only 16% of people who use drugs, only 23% of sex workers, and only 45% of trans people. The majority of key populations interviewed did not feel safe or comfortable at the facility, and many reported major privacy violations. There are also still reports of people living with HIV being shouted at or sent to the back of the queue if they miss an appointment, which goes against protocols outlined in National ART guidelines.

While this shows the data across the province, at the community meetings we will hone in on data across two districts: Buffalo City Metro and OR Tambo. Ritshidze data will be presented together with the personal experiences of people living with HIV, key populations, and other public healthcare users. The meetings will highlight what progress has been made in the last year and what still needs to improve in each district. **The embargoed State of Health report and district-level presentations are available upon request.**

*Ritshidze is a programme of the PLHIV Sector made up of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), National Association of People Living with HIV (NAPWA), Positive Action Campaign, Positive Women's Network, the South African Network of Religious Leaders Living with HIV (SANERELA+).*

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