

Media alert: 4th edition Ritshidze report reveals litany of problems, inc. only 17% of people with HIV get 3 month supply of ARVs in the Free State

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27 August 2024, 10am	Ritshidze Community Meeting for Thabo Mofutsanyana	Bethlehem
29 August 2024, 10am	Ritshidze Community Meeting for Lejweleputswa	Thabong

Sign up for live stream: bit.ly/RitshidzeFreeState2024

On 27 August 2024, Ritshidze will launch a detailed report into the state of the public healthcare system in the Free State. While some improvement has been made, a litany of challenges still persists including: only 17% of people getting a 3 month supply of ARVs, long waiting times, a culture of unfriendliness and punishment, poor treatment literacy education, lack of access to lubricant, and poor clinic cleanliness.

The report will be presented to the Free State health department, the Thabo Mofutsanyana health department, the Lejweleputswa health department & other duty bearers at two community meetings in Bethlehem and Thabong. We will also hear the real experiences of people living with HIV, the LGBTQIA+ community, sex workers, people who use drugs, & other public healthcare users accessing healthcare in the districts.

This is the fourth edition of the annual Free State — State of Health report. Data in this report were collected between April and May 2024 at 51 facilities in the province (27 in Thabo Mofutsanyana and 24 in Lejweleputswa). Surveys were carried out with 2,659 public healthcare users at the facility and 1,449 members of key populations in the community. **The embargoed State of Health report is available upon request.**

Key issues found include:

- + **Only 17% getting longer ARV refills:** A longer supply of ARVs makes ARV collection easier but only 17% reported receiving a 3 month supply in the Free State — despite being recommended in National ART Guidelines. The Free State has made the least progress towards giving people longer ARV refills out of all provinces monitored by Ritshidze.
- + **Long waiting times:** Long waiting times continue to frustrate public healthcare users who waste long hours in queues for check-ups and even just to collect medication. 81% think the waiting times at the facility are long.
- + **Culture of unfriendliness & punishment:** Only 50% of public healthcare users reported that staff were always friendly, only 55% of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM), only 48% of trans people, only 47% of sex workers, and as few as 37% of people who use drugs. 26% of people living with HIV who had been late for/missed appointments said staff shouted at them on return, and 46% were sent to the back of the queue.
- + **Denial of services without ID or transfer letter:** 130 people told us they or someone they knew had been denied services without a transfer letter over the last year. On top of that, 550 people also reported being denied services without an ID. The Free State was one of the worst provinces for turning people away without an ID accounting for 24% of the 2,309 of people who have reported this to us across the 8 provinces in which we monitor.

- + **Poor treatment literacy:** Only 78% of those surveyed understood that having an undetectable viral load means treatment is working well — and just 72% understood that having an undetectable viral load means a person cannot transmit HIV.
- + **Lack of availability of lubricants & PrEP:** Despite promises made by the Free State health department in 2022, this year there was a decline in the number of sites making lubricants freely available. Out of 95 clinics monitored, only 41% actually had lubricants available.
- + **Dirty facilities:** 21% of public healthcare users reported that clinics were dirty or very dirty — worse than any other province monitored by Ritshidze. 75% of toilets were also found to be in a bad condition, with 21% having no running water and 26% having no water at all.

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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