

Media alert: 4th edition Ritshidze report reveals high numbers of people refused services in Eastern Cape

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17 September 2024, 10am	Ritshidze Community Meeting for Buffalo City	Braelyn
19 September 2024, 10am	Ritshidze Community Meeting for OR Tambo	Khwezi

Sign up for live stream: bit.ly/RitshidzeEasternCape2024

On 17 September 2024, Ritshidze will launch a detailed report into the state of the public healthcare system in the Eastern Cape. While some improvement has been made, a litany of challenges still persists including: people being denied services without a transfer letter or ID, or because they are queer, trans, use drugs or do sex work, only 59% of people getting a 3 month supply of ARVs, long waiting times, a culture of unfriendliness, trans women being told to use service delivery points for men, and limited access to lubricant at facilities for HIV prevention.

The report will be presented to the Eastern Cape health department, the Buffalo City health department, the OR Tambo health department & other duty bearers at two community meetings in Braelyn and Ikwezi. 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 Eastern Cape State of Health report. Data in this report were collected between July and August 2024 at 54 facilities in the province (18 in Buffalo City and 21 in OR Tambo). Surveys were carried out with 2,935 public healthcare users at the facility and 2,833 members of key populations in the community. **The embargoed State of Health report is available upon request.**

Key issues found include:

- + **Denial of services:** 495 people told us they or someone they knew had been denied services without a transfer letter over the last year. The Eastern Cape is one of the worst provinces for turning people away like this — turning people away at 2.5 times the rate of other provinces and accounting for 33% of the 1,508 people who have reported being refused services without a transfer letter to us across the 8 provinces in which we monitor. On top of that, 346 people also reported being denied services without an ID. In addition 7% of sex workers, 9% of trans people, 14% of people who use drugs, and 15% of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with other men (GBMSM) we surveyed had been denied services in the last year.
- + **Only 59% getting longer ARV refills:** A longer supply of ARVs makes ARV collection easier but only 59% reported receiving a 3 month supply in the Eastern Cape — despite being recommended in National ART Guidelines. Only 48% reported receiving a 3 month supply in Alfred Nzo and only 50% in OR Tambo. OR Tambo and Alfred Nzo are among the districts that have made the least progress towards giving people longer ARV refills out of all districts monitored by Ritshidze.
- + **Long waiting times:** Another challenge highlighted in the report are the long waiting times that continue to frustrate public healthcare users who waste long hours in queues for check-ups and even just to collect medication. While waiting times have come down since when Ritshidze first began monitoring in 2020, in the Eastern Cape, progress has stalled over the past two years. 60% of those surveyed thought the waiting times at the facility were long.

- + **Too few people decanted to pick-up points:** People should be able to collect their ARVs through easier and quicker pick-up points. Yet 49% of people surveyed still reported collecting through standard medicine dispensing, having to consult with a clinician at the facility to get rescripted on each visit. 41% had never even been offered the option to use a pick-up point or club — and 49% of all people living with HIV surveyed said that they would like to collect ARVs closer to their home if it were possible.
- + **Unfriendly staff:** Since last year's report the clinic staff have become less friendly towards public healthcare users. The ill treatment is particularly bad for members of key populations — only 18% of GBMSM said staff were always friendly, only 15% of trans people, only 12% of sex workers, and only 7% of people who use drugs.
- + **Trans women told to use service delivery points for men:** Trans women we spoke to also recalled uncomfortable and dehumanising experiences of being told to use Men's Corner to get their health services — as reported by 27% of trans women surveyed. Being forced to access services in spaces designated for men is reckless, dangerous, and unconstitutional.
- + **Lack of availability of lubricants:** Only 30% of clinics monitored had lubricant available. For those who did ask for lubricants, too often staff were disrespectful.

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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