

## JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors and Health Journalists  
Issued by: The National Department of Health  
Date: Saturday, 15 February 2025

### International Childhood Cancer Awareness Day – 15 February 2025

In alignment with its ongoing dedication to fostering awareness and advancing care for children and teenagers facing cancer, South Africa is honoured to participate in the global initiative for International Childhood Cancer Day (ICCD) 2025. This initiative, spearheaded by Childhood Cancer International (CCI), aims to highlight the vital need for improved access to treatment, care and support for children and adolescents impacted by cancer worldwide.

The Department of Health working with stakeholders including the World Health Organization, Childhood Cancer Foundation SA and SAAPHO recognise the importance of collaboration and commitment in addressing these challenges and supporting those in need.

International Childhood Cancer Day, celebrated every 15 February, unites organisations, healthcare professionals, and advocates in a powerful movement to ensure early diagnosis, quality treatment, and unwavering support for young cancer patients and their families. The 2025 campaign, titled "Equal Access to Care for All Children with Cancer," is a bold initiative aimed at promoting effective solutions, showcasing impactful community initiatives, and fostering transformative change to significantly improve childhood cancer outcomes on a global scale. This year's theme, "*Inspiring Action*," emphasises the necessity of collective efforts to eliminate disparities and ensure that all children have access to the care they deserve.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 400,000 children are diagnosed with cancer globally each year. In South Africa, around 1,000 new cases are recorded annually by the South African Children's Tumour Registry. However, it is crucial to note that many additional cases remain undiagnosed and untreated due to barriers in accessing healthcare.

Early detection is essential for saving lives. Parents, caregivers, and healthcare providers must recognise the warning signs, which include: a white spot in the eye or sudden blindness; a lump or swelling in any part of the body, especially the stomach; unexplained fever or weight loss; persistent bone pain or easy fractures; difficulty walking, changes in coordination, or severe headaches (sometimes with vomiting)

"The early diagnosis of childhood cancer and the prompt referral to specialized treatment centres are crucial for enhancing patient outcomes. Childhood cancer is indeed curable; however, this is contingent upon timely diagnosis and immediate treatment," said Professor Gita Naidu, Chair of the South African Association of Paediatric Haematology Oncology (SAAPHO).



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Prof Gita Naidu, Head of Paediatric Oncology at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital continues by highlighting the significant challenges faced by families, including emotional distress and anxiety; financial pressures from lost income and medical costs; the challenges of traveling long distances for treatment; struggling to balance caregiving responsibilities among siblings and social stigma associated with childhood cancer.

Speaking of the importance of psychosocial support to childhood cancer patients and their families Dr Kibachio Mwangi of the WHO South African office indicated that “childhood cancer treatment is incomplete without palliative care which provides the much needed support for pain relief, dignity and psychosocial support to patients and their families” he indicated that they are working with the Department of Health and other stakeholders to streamline the provision of palliative care through specialised units as well as in community and home-based platforms.

On this important occasion, all stakeholders recognise and celebrate the outstanding contributions of healthcare professionals, civil society, parent organisations, NGOs, and individuals dedicated to improving care and outcomes for childhood cancer. Your unwavering commitment is essential to our mission, and together, we are making a significant impact.

South Africa supports the WHO Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer (GICC), which aims to achieve a global survival rate of 60% by 2030. This initiative prioritises providing treatment to children and adolescents in a way that maintains their dignity and reduces suffering.

“We firmly stand in solidarity with children, families, and caregivers impacted by childhood cancer,” declared Hedley Lewis, CEO of CHOC Childhood Cancer Foundation SA. “By championing ICCD 2025, we are committed to raising awareness, advocating for essential healthcare reforms, and ensuring that every child has equal access to life-saving treatments.”

Join us in the powerful movement for ICCD 2025 by sharing your voice on social media with #ICCD2025. Connect with our official channels on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter to help ignite change.

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