

THE DISTRICT HEALTH BAROMETER – A TOOL TO MONITOR PROGRESS AND SUPPORT IMPROVEMENT OF EQUITABLE PROVISION OF PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

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The achievement of South Africa's underlying policy goal of equity in access to and quality of health care is challenged by variations within and between its health districts and compromised in various ways by the absence of objective comparative information. Managers at all levels need appropriate information to analyse the health situation, set relevant objectives and develop plans susceptible to monitoring as well as for planning equitable allocation of funds and services.

In order to meet this need, HST successfully piloted the District Health Barometer (DHB) report in 2005, in collaboration with the National Department of Health and other stakeholders. The DHB is an innovation in improving the understanding and measurement of health services and health equity, as it assists with making functional information available for the monitoring of progress in health services delivery at the 'district level'.

The report compares key health indicators between the six metropolitan districts, between the 13 rural node districts and between all 53 districts throughout the country. Analysis of this carefully selected range of health indicators, obtained from the District Health Information System, the financial management information system and other sources such as the National TB Register and the Census 2001, from which comparisons between and among districts can be made, facilitates identification of problem areas and the corresponding corrective measures. Inequities in health outcomes, health resource allocation and outputs and the efficiency of health processes between rural and urban areas are addressed throughout the report.

The DHB functions as a unique tool which managers at all levels in the health sector and those in other areas such as the national treasury, the academic sector and policy makers, can use to:

- Investigate reasons why and solutions to inequitable access to health within and between districts,
- Plan and facilitate equitable distribution of funds
- Identify gaps in data quality
- Identify research into equity, operational research for clarification of reasons of poor performance and identification of corrective measures.

The DHB Year 1(2004) and DHB 2005/06 are freely downloadable from <http://www.hst.org.za/publications>