

Foreword

Seasoned health professionals are familiar with the example of a busload of passengers, each instructing the driver to go in a different direction and resulting in a stationary bus as the driver cannot decide which instruction to follow. The same happens when health services do not have clear and specific plans. Plans with measurable indicators and targets are required at all levels (i.e. national, provincial, district, sub-district, facility and units within facilities). We need good health information to determine progress and to measure the results of implementing such plans. The District Health Barometer (DHB), a Health Systems Trust (HST) publication, makes a meaningful contribution to providing this information.

The DHB, the only publication of its kind in South Africa, prepared by government and non-government health experts, provides an annual overview of the public health services. Data for the publication are drawn from a range of sources including the National Department of Health's District Health Information System (DHIS), Statistics South Africa, the electronic tuberculosis register and National Treasury.

Health service policy makers, managers, researchers and academics use the DHB extensively on a global basis. In order to improve the use of the DHB amongst district, sub-district and health facility managers, since this will further improve the quality of health services data in South Africa, HST has conducted a number of workshops on the use of the 2010/11 DHB in the past year. The workshops enabled facility managers to use the information contained in the DHB to develop operational plans to improve the quality of health services at implementation level.

This 7th edition of the DHB profiles South Africa, with its nine provinces and 52 districts. The publication includes more than 40 indicators – with trend illustrations and a section on South Africa's burden of disease. HST constantly strives to improve the DHB and indicators on chronic diseases have been added to this edition.

The DHB highlights areas that require deeper research to identify the underlying issues contributing to the indicator values and trends. We urge health service providers, managers, researchers, academics and policy makers to use this valuable information to improve the services provided to the South African community. We invite commentary and feedback that will facilitate further improvement and enhance the usefulness of future editions of the DHB.

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