

Foreword

There has recently been a strong focus globally on improving health information systems, particularly in low and middle income countries. The volume and complexity of information gathered, created, manipulated and analysed has increased significantly during the last few years. Intensified monitoring of South Africa's progress towards the MDGs, in particular those dealing with women's and children's health (MDG4 and MDG5), has been accompanied by a greater demand for more and better information to track performance and ensure accountability, planning and allocation of resources.

Findings from an external evaluation of the District Health Barometer highlighted its value as the only publication of its kind in South Africa currently that places comparative data of the different health services at implementation level in the public domain. Tools and publications such as the District Health Barometer thus play an important role in providing information for decision making during this crucial time.

In this edition HST has endeavoured to further refine and develop the report. Valuable additions to what has been made available in previous years include:

- graphic illustrations of trend data of various indicators over a five to eight year timeframe thus allowing for a clearer picture of disease progression and service provision,
- deprivation indices calculated to sub-district level, which provide insight into the variation of deprivation and need within a district, as well as a three year trend of the index at district level,
- TB case load and new smear positive incidence by district to augment the existing TB indicators (TB cure rate and smear positive conversion rate),
- Measles immunisation coverage and drop out rate to augment the existing DTP1-3 immunisation indicators, thus providing a wider picture of the provision of child health care services.

Although data on the health status and provision in South Africa have improved over the last few years, there are still gaps and quality concerns that leave a degree of uncertainty on the exact health status in a number of important areas such as HIV and AIDS, TB and infant mortality rates, particularly at a district and sub-district level. This report shows that whilst some progress in improving primary health care data and services has been made in certain areas, many areas still have a very long way to go. We trust that the District Health Barometer will continue to play a useful and supporting role in the developing health system in South Africa and in the ongoing pursuit of timely and accurate data to ensure accountability for resources and to meet global challenges such as the MDGs.



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