

Speaker 2 — Ms Thulile Zondi

Chief Director: Health Information, Research, Epidemiology, Monitoring and Evaluation, National Department of Health

11:05 – 11:10

Cluster remarks & introduction of keynote

5 minutes

Programme Director, Dr Sigwebela, Deputy Director-General Hunter, Dr Vallabhjee, distinguished guests, good morning. On behalf of the Cluster for Health Information, Research, Epidemiology, Monitoring and Evaluation, I am pleased to be with you today.

Our Cluster carries the responsibility, within the National Department of Health, for the information architecture that supports every level of the system: from a single facility register to national policy decisions. When we speak about the District Health Barometer, we are speaking about one of the most visible products of that architecture.

The DHB draws primarily on WebDHIS — the web-based District Health Information System — complemented by data from National Treasury’s Basic Accounting System, PERSAL, and the surveys of Statistics South Africa. That combination is deliberate. It lets us see service delivery, expenditure, and the workforce side by side, at district level.

Within the Department, we are clear that data is not an end in itself. It is a means to plan, to monitor, to evaluate, and to improve. The DHB supports that purpose by doing three things that raw data cannot do on its own.

Firstly, it disaggregates. Every indicator is brought down to the 52-district level, so that national averages, which often conceal more than they reveal, are tested against district realities.

Secondly, it contextualises. Each chapter is authored by subject-matter experts who do not simply present numbers; they interpret them. They tell us what the numbers mean, what the plausible drivers are, and where the data quality caveats lie.

Thirdly, it ranks. The league tables in this publication are intentionally uncomfortable. They are not designed to shame, they are designed to prompt the question: ‘Why is my district here, and not there?’ That question is the beginning of quality improvement.

It is now my privilege to introduce our keynote speaker. Ms Jeanette Hunter is the Deputy Director-General for Primary Health Care in the National Department of Health. She is one of the most experienced leaders in our system, having worked extensively on the re-engineering of primary health care and on the policy architecture that now prepares the country for National Health Insurance.

Primary health care is the place where most of the indicators in this Barometer come to life — where an antenatal booking happens, where a child is immunised, where a person living with HIV

collects their treatment, where a mental-health client is first seen. If anyone in this system is well placed to read the DHB against the PHC agenda, it is Ms Hunter.

Ms Hunter — the floor is yours.