

HIV/AIDS FIGHT WILL NEED R30BN YEARLY BY 2015

by Lyse Comins

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The battle against HIV/AIDS will need at least R30 billion a year by 2015 and the government should urgently plug the three big drains on resources - corruption, incompetence and the high cost of private healthcare.

Dr Adila Hassim, director of litigation and legal services at the AIDS Law Project and advisor on the Global Commission on HIV and Law, was speaking at the closing session of the SA AIDS Conference in Durban.

Hassim criticised the government for not taking action against corrupt and incompetent officials. About 8 000 local and international health experts, doctors, nurses and top academics attended the Conference.

“Three things that drain money out of the system are corruption, inefficiency and incompetence in financial management and the high cost of private healthcare. In the Eastern Cape, R800 million has been drained due to corruption. Special leave means you get aid for your corrupt behaviour and you don’t have to do any work. Criminal charges should be brought against corrupt officials.”

She said provisions for criminal action in the Public Finance Management and the Municipal Systems acts had never been used against officials. Hassim said the picture presented of rampant wastage and corruption at municipal level - where 25 per cent of audits were either late or had not been submitted, and 47 per cent were found to be unreliable - reflected what was happening in higher tiers of government.

“Sixty-eight municipalities have financial problems, but only 23 have financial recovery plans. A quarter of all municipalities cannot account for their expenditure at all.”

Hassim said that, according to a report by the Centre for Economic Governance and AIDS in Africa and the Results for Development Institute, implementing the National Strategic Plan 2012-2016 would need at least R30bn (yearly) in government spending by 2015. She said the problem of the private healthcare sector absorbing the lion’s share of resources, but serving a smaller part of the population, would be rectified by the implementation of the proposed National Health Insurance plan.

Private healthcare sector profit margins grew from 10 per cent in the late 1980s to more than 20 per cent in the past decade.

KwaZulu-Natal Premier Dr Zweli Mkhize said the fight against HIV/AIDS appeared more “hopeful”. He gave assurance of the government’s commitment to provide more accessible antiretroviral treatment. “I am happy that there has been a reduction in the level of mother-to-child transmissions.”