

1 August 2024

REPORT: INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE, MUNICH GERMANY 22-26 JULY 2024

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On behalf of myself, Christine du Preez, Fortunate Khumalo and Sr Laverne Stebbing I would like to thank the Discovery fund, HTT Board of Trustees and Management for this incredible opportunity to represent Hlokomela on the international stage.

Between the four of us we managed to attend quite a few session presentations, getting the latest information on what is happening in the world of HIV&AIDS. Although, the networking opportunities the team capitalised on in the corridors, the Global Village and poster presentation area cannot be compared to any other platform in South Africa.



Fortunate Khumalo (General Manager) with the Mpumalanga MEC for Health Sasekani Manzini, Christine du Preez (Managing Director) and Sr Laverne Stebbing (Clinical Manager).

We have tried several times to find a road in to have an MoU with the Mpumalanga Department of Health, all to no avail despite a good yet unofficial working relationship in previous years. Fortunate managed to secure a meeting with the Mpumalanga MEC for Health Sasekani Manzini after meeting her at the conference. Since then HTT has sent a letter to her office stating our services and possible benefits for MDoH and HTT in working together, requesting a meeting with MDoH.

Day 1 – 22 July 2024

Every day offered a wide range of sessions to choose from, with 9 or more sessions running concurrently in the same time slot starting at 07:00 with the last for the day starting at 18:00. While Fortunate focussed on attending sessions regarding finances and fundraising in light of available HIV funding decreasing by 8% over the past 3 years, Laverne and Christine attended more of the scientific sessions related to treatment and care. I focussed on attending all sessions related to mental health. We also learnt about the 4th “90” target: Accelerating the integration of HIV and noncommunicable disease responses to improve quality of life for people living with and affected by HIV. Most sessions featured panellists from major donors such as PEPFAR and Global Fund. The opening event was huge with the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz speaking of Germany’s commitment to the HIV response. More than 15 000 delegates from more than 170 countries attended the conference.



Day 2 – 23 July 2024

A community workshop, organized by the Elton John AIDS Foundation and United for Global Mental Health, called for increased donor investment in mental health for HIV and TB.

The symposium, “A brave new world? The potential of artificial intelligence”, explored how AI can enhance medical decision making and is revolutionizing mental health and well-being. This was a very interesting session on how an app can be used for mental health and health seeking behaviour, although not

suitable for the majority of HTT beneficiaries who don't have access to smart phones.

"The case for decriminalization of sex work" workshop showcased the post-democracy South African campaign for the decriminalization of sex work with a focus on the effects of criminalization: gender-based violence, barriers to accessing health services, HIV and STI acquisition rate, stigmatization and human rights violations. It also focused on the advocacy strategies used by sex workers and sex worker rights organizations in the fight to decriminalize sex work. These include mobilization, creative activism, lobbying, media campaigns and research – a lot of the work that we do in HTT already since 2014 when first implementing the Sex Work Programme with NACOSA.



Day 3 – 24 July 2024

Laverne attended the PEPFAR Nursing Leadership Initiative which was a valuable session where nurses could give input on their real-life challenges in the field. It was just unfortunate that there were not many nurses in attendance at the conference – once again an incredible opportunity for HTT to have two nurses to

represent the organisation! She also learned more about advanced HIV disease later in the day.

I attended a very interesting presentation on the Owete ("brothers") intervention on how social structures (word of mouth) in a male dominated fishing community were leveraged to increase the number of men accessing HIV health care services.



Christine du Preez met the new Limpopo MEC for Health, Dieketseng Masesi Mashego.

Fortunate rubbed shoulders with Joe Phahla and Paul Mashatile as well as delegates from the National DoH in the session "The South African HIV prevalence, incidence and behaviour (SABSSM) survey results: A legacy of public health data that has improved lives of South Africans." All while Christine managed to get the latest information on routine mpox vaccination strategies in the population at risk.



Christine du Preez with Dawie Nel Director of Pretoria-based OUT LGBT well-being) and HTT Chairperson Dr Mariette Slabbert at her poster presentation.

Day 4 – 25 July 2024

“Together for diversity, justice and health” HTT also joined our voices to this march through the streets of Munich with calls for “justice for all” from Fortunate as she held the banner high.



Today Christine got all the latest information about Lenacapavir as PrEP, a sub-dermal injection every 6 months.

Day 5 – 26 July 2024

Despite searching high and low between the mental health sessions for some form of body-based therapy such as Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises

(TRE) being used as an HIV intervention – there was nothing. I asked in different sessions whether the speakers/panel members had used body-based therapy but the question was met with stunned looks. The session “Bridging mind and body: The interconnectedness of HIV and mental health” seemed to be the most promising to hear something on body-based therapy but still there was nothing. What was encouraging though is the move towards using more lay workers and peer led interventions to tackle mental health – again something that HTT has been doing for many years through the Nompilos and SWP peer educators. Our abstract for the study on TRE with sex workers was not accepted for this conference, but we will try for the SA AIDS Conference in 2026. There is a huge gap and opportunity for us to talk about TRE as part of the mental health package for HIV interventions. The most important tip in this regard was that any mental health intervention needs to be measurable and then measured.



Doing TRE at the conference in the exhibition area for United for Global Mental Health.