



Reflections on the 12th Annual National Aids Conference

#ExecutiveMayorMorero

Dear Residents of Johannesburg,

This past week, I had the honour of joining national partners, researchers, health professionals, civil society organisations, and community leaders at the 12th Annual South African Aids Conference. Every year, this gathering reminds us not only of the science and policy behind our country's HIV response, but of the human beings, the families, and the communities whose lives depend on the work we do. It is a space where we confront our challenges honestly, celebrate our progress, and renew our shared commitment to protecting every life.

While South Africa continues to make great strides in expanding antiretroviral treatment and strengthening prevention programmes, the conference reminded us that our work is far from over. Too many people—especially here in Johannesburg—still face barriers to accessing healthcare, support, and safety. Leading experts shared important insights on how we can do more to prevent new infections, strengthen viral suppression, and break the cycle of social and economic conditions that put our residents at risk. Behind every statistic is a story, and behind every challenge is a person with hopes, struggles, and a future worth fighting for.

As the heart of our nation's economy, Johannesburg carries a unique responsibility. High mobility, migration, unemployment, and urban poverty make many of our residents even more vulnerable, particularly young people and key populations who need us to stand firmly with them. The conference reinforced that compassion must guide our response. We must meet people where they are, listen to their realities, and design programmes that treat every individual with dignity and respect.

One of the strongest messages from the conference was the need to tailor prevention strategies for a mature epidemic—strategies that combine innovation with deep community engagement. I am proud that the City of Johannesburg has already begun integrating these approaches into our health

programmes. We are committed to ensuring that our response is not only scientifically sound, but humane, accessible, and centred on the lived experiences of our residents.

We also reflected on the importance of better data systems to help us detect challenges early—because every missed appointment and every unsuppressed viral load represent a life that needs support. Our City is enhancing reporting tools in our clinics and strengthening linkage-to-care programmes so that no one falls through the cracks. We want every resident who tests positive to know: *You are not alone. Your City is here for you.*

The conference reminded all leaders, including myself, that political commitment must be rooted in empathy and guided by the voices of the people we serve. As your Executive Mayor and as Chairperson of the Johannesburg Aids Council, I reaffirm my personal commitment—and the City's collective commitment—to ending Aids as a public health threat. We will continue to strengthen partnerships with community organisations, health workers, researchers, and government colleagues. And we will intensify targeted interventions in communities where vulnerability is highest, ensuring no neighbourhood is left behind.

Our progress depends on unity. It depends on every clinic worker who shows kindness, every parent who teaches their child about health and responsibility, every civil society organisation that stands in the gap, and every resident who cares enough to support a friend, neighbour, or loved one living with HIV. Together, we form the human shield that protects our City.

To all the experts and health teams who represented Johannesburg at the conference: thank you. To the frontline workers who serve with compassion every day: we see you, we appreciate you, and we honour your commitment. And to the residents of Johannesburg: your courage, resilience, and spirit inspire me every day.

Let us continue walking this journey together with determination, compassion, and a shared belief that we can end Aids in our lifetime. Johannesburg will continue to lead with evidence, with heart, and with the unwavering conviction that every life matters.

Until next time,

Johannesburg Executive Mayor Councillor Sello Dada Morero