

Desmond Tutu Health Foundation



Translating science
into global health impact

The pursuit of excellence in research, treatment and prevention of HIV and related infections in South Africa



DESMOND TUTU
HEALTH FOUNDATION

The Desmond Tutu Health Foundation (DTHF) is a registered non-profit company established in association with the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre, an accredited research center within the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town (UCT). Bridging rigorous academic research with community development programs, DTHF collaborates with those most at risk to find innovative solutions in the prevention and treatment of HIV and related infections.

DTHF's research includes a range of HIV prevention modalities, vaccine candidates, treatment delivery and adherence, clinical trials, ground-breaking new drugs, and innovative technologies to address tuberculosis (TB) transmission.

From small beginnings in the 1990s as the HIV Research Unit at Somerset Hospital under the directorship of Professor Robin Wood, DTHF was subsequently established at its present headquarters at University of Cape Town Clinical (UCT) in 2004. The HIV Research Unit was the first public clinic in South Africa to offer antiretroviral therapy to those living with HIV.

DTHF has established clinical research sites in under-resourced areas where people are at high risk of HIV infection. The Clinical Research Site (CRS) at the Grootte Schuur Hospital is a nationally accredited site that forms part of the UCT Trials Unit. Since the beginning of the program, the clinic has managed over 60 pharmaceutical and investigator-driven clinical trials in both HIV prevention and treatment. The Gugulethu CRS focuses on HIV and TB treatment and prevention, with a strong emphasis on adherence to treatment guidelines and preventive measures. The Emavundleni CRS is an internationally recognized site for HIV prevention trials that include vaccines, long-acting antiretroviral-based injectables, microbicides, sexually transmitted infection vaccines and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Located in the south peninsula of Cape Town, the Masiphumelele CRS has been recognized as a pioneer in HIV

prevention and adolescent research. The research team has been conducting clinical trials and epidemiological research at the site for more than 15 years.

In addition to biomedical research, a socio-behavioral division seeks to understand the complex drivers affecting individual health-seeking behavior. Adolescents are of particular concern, as well as key populations — lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ), sex workers, and men who have sex with men. A fleet of five mobile units assist in taking a wellness package, including HIV testing, to these hard-to-reach groups who tend to avoid conventional clinics. The DTHF Youth Centre in Masiphumelele also provides sexual and reproductive health services alongside educational and recreational activities.

Pairing internationally acclaimed research with community-driven development program, DTHF strives to improve the health and well-being of the communities it serves while contributing to local and national health policy.



Tutu Teen Truck: a non-traditional health clinic on the back of a truck that brings accessible, free, efficient and youth-friendly health screening to young people in under-served communities of Cape Town.

Laboratory Capacity

The Laboratory at the clinical research sites at Grootte Schuur Hospital (GSH) and Masiphumelele Research Offices (MRO) are good clinical laboratory practice (GCLP)-accredited and have the capacity to perform HIV, pregnancy, trichomonas, urinalysis, and SARS-CoV-2 rapid testing. The laboratory at GSH is equipped to process blood samples for long-term and short-term stor-

age with International Air Transport Association certification for shipping samples both locally and internationally. The GSH laboratory is equipped with two refrigerated centrifuges, two minus-80 degrees freezers, a minus-20 degrees freezer and a 2-8 degrees refrigerator.

The Aerobiology Research Laboratory, situated at the MRO site, consists of four main components: a Biosafety Level 3 (BSL3) Microbiology Unit, a Microscopy Unit, a Molecular Biology Unit, and a Bio-InVENTORY Storage Unit. The entire laboratory facility operates under GCLP practices and regulations, and the Microbiology laboratory incorporates BSL3 Laboratory Engineering Controls.

People

The DTHF research, clinical, and community outreach staff share a common purpose to lessen the impact of the HIV epidemic on individuals, families, and communities through innovation and collaboration. The study team consists of research investigators and study coordinators who manage pharmaceutical and investigator-driven clinical trials in both HIV prevention and treatment. The deputy director, Professor Linda-Gail Bekker, is a Full Member of UCT's Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM) and Professor of Medicine in the UCT Department of Medicine. Senior investigators, Associate Professor Catherine Orrell and Dr. Keren Midelkoop, are Associate Members of the UCT IDM.

Community Engagement

With the cooperation of community leaders, DTHF provides opportunities for residents to assist in research studies and programs. Through community engagement activities, advocacy, training, and research, DTHF's Key Populations program aims to address the social and structural factors that drive the HIV epidemic. The Community Liaison team based in Philippi Village supports the safe space for leaders in the management and coordination of the program. Apart from providing an entry point for recruitment of participants in DTHF's clinical trials, the safe spaces provide HIV education, address stigma and behavioural risks, and link individuals into HIV testing or care. The Community Liaison team also supports the communities in organizing their own activities, such as netball, debates, drag shows, hiking, and pride parades. The DTHF has established an LGBTIQ advocates' forum for community stakeholders working in the same men-who-have-sex-with-men community networks in order to coordinate activities and maximize our impact.

IAVI-supported activities

- IAVI fellowship program since 2016.
- Annual IAVI adolescent research workshops.

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