



Health Systems
Enablement &
Innovation

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Facilitating Cancer Diagnosis & Treatment In South Africa

From April 2019 to March 2022, the Health Systems Enablement and Innovation (HSEi) unit at Wits University successfully executed the Decentralized Cancer Care Programme & Eastern Cape Collaborative Community Cancer Initiative in South Africa's Eastern Cape province. Working in collaboration with the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation (BMSF), the three-year project was designed to improve patient outcomes for lung and other common cancers affecting people in the area. The project, implemented with support from Eastern Cape Department of Health and the Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital, brought more than R25 million worth of cancer diagnosis and healthcare programming to the community.

Through this project, HSEi and BMSF successfully established a primary-secondary-tertiary oncology platform—the first of its kind in the region. This platform has already started providing cancer services to underserved rural populations in three local health districts. To date, more than 5,000 people have received care.

In addition to building the infrastructure and capacity needed to screen, diagnose, and treat cancer, the project made several other measurable impacts on the community. It raised awareness of lung cancer, linked people to screening, supported patients, and provided palliative and survivor counselling and care.



5,000

The number of people that have received care at the first-ever primary-secondary-tertiary oncology platform in South Africa's Eastern Cape, launched by HSEi and BMSF in 2019.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- The project procured equipment, developed radiation services, and opened a new oncology unit at the Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital in Mthatha, South Africa. Patients are currently receiving treatment and chemotherapy in this new facility.
- The project also procured equipment and established a fully operational Oncology Unit at St. Elizabeth Hospital, which services a different part of the province.
- The project has offered training to health professionals in seven different hospitals, including Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital (the hub) and satellite locations. In addition to lung cancer screening, the project trained staff in palliative care, breast cancer, and cervical cancer screening.
- The project energized various departments at the Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital to embark in collaborative clinical outreach with gynecology (cervical cancer), urology (prostate cancer), surgery (breast cancer) and the dermatology department for skin-related cancers.
- The project significantly improved how patients at both sites receive care. In addition to offering care from the moment people enter the clinic, the project established a follow-up system to ensure patients attend appointments and take their medications.

COMMUNITY IN FOCUS

HSEi Successfully Empowers Community Health Workers to Support Cancer Patients

There are many different barriers preventing people from receiving care. These challenges are often more pronounced in rural communities, where accurate information and reliable transportation aren't guaranteed. With this in mind, the Decentralized Cancer Care Programme & Eastern Cape Collaborative Community Cancer Initiative trained community healthcare workers and NGOs on common cancer signs and symptoms, teaching them how to navigate the referral pathway and help patients reach a hospital for timely cancer management and treatment. The project also hired dedicated patient navigators—community outreach experts that help clients navigate healthcare services and systems.

By focusing on community outreach and training, HSEi and BMSF helped lower barriers to care.



Learn more about HSEi's work to establish centres of excellence for cancer and other diseases at [HSEi.co.za](https://www.hsei.co.za).