JOHANNESBURG, 2 May (PLUSNEWS) - South Africa's HIV/AIDS programme received a boost last week with the announcement of a US $165.2 million grant from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis (TB) and Malaria.

South Africa's grant awards cover two proposals, focusing on treatment, care, and support of people with TB and HIV. The Fund awarded almost US $93 million to the country's coordinating mechanism, the South African National AIDS Council.

The remaining US $72-million went to a proposal by the KwaZulu-Natal provincial coordinating mechanism (PCM) for a range of care-oriented services for those living with HIV/AIDS.

KwaZulu Natal has the highest HIV positive population in the country, with one in three adults estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS. But the award was highly unusual, as the Fund's guidelines say that priority would be given to country coordinating mechanisms.

The provincial application to the Fund was facilitated by the Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine's Enhancing Care Initiative and HIV/AIDS Public Health Programme, a collaboration between the medical school and the provincial Department of Health.

KwaZulu Natal PCM member, Prof Umesh Laloo, told Plusnews that the success of the province's proposal resulted from a number of public-private partnerships.

"Apart from the university, we had the Durban Chamber of Commerce, NGOs like the South Coast highway hospice, NAPWA [National Association of People living with HIV/AIDS], legal networks, various religious organisations as well as the provincial department of health."

The proposal had provided clear strategies on caring for people living with HIV/AIDS, as the Enhancing Care Initiative had been implemented in several pilot sites throughout the province Laloo said.

Voluntary counselling and testing and the identification and treatment of opportunistic diseases were existing services that would be improved with the grant.

An extensive training programme in the public health sector was underway and would ensure that health workers could provide adequate care and treatment. Laloo stressed that antiretrovirals would only be provided in settings with adequate resources and with properly trained staff.

The biggest allocation in the province would go to a home-based care partnership between the university and the Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The services will be rolled out over five years under the guidance of an advisory board.

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IRIN-SA
Tel: +27 11 880-4633
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