

Wits' Agincourt Unit receives millions from Anglo American Chairman's Fund

From 2010 to 2012, the Anglo American Chairman's Fund has provided almost R2.9 million towards University of the Witwatersrand's Agincourt Unit three-year project, titled 'HIV Treatment and Care in Rural South Africa: Strengthening Private and Public Services'.

The funding allowed the Unit to extend its area of work from 21 villages and about 70,000 people, to the current size of 27 villages and 90,000 people. Geographically, these rural communities lie north east of Hazyview, which is a town in the Ehlanzeni District Municipality in Mpumalanga. It has also been able to undertake and evaluate larger interventions, focusing particularly on children and adolescents.

In particular, the Unit is now better equipped to support some of its HIV-related work, as well as strengthen medical assistance by evaluating and using community information.

Agincourt Unit founder Professor Steve Tollman notes that the grant is making a real difference to the work of the Agincourt Unit. "Areas such as the one described above, are often overlooked because they are difficult to access and work in. The grant from the Chairman's Fund is therefore of enormous value, as it allows us to focus work on the high priority condition in a rural community, and mount a more effective public health, public sector and social response."

Specific focus

The unit was established in 1992 as a research unit of the School of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand. It later became the only Medical Research Council Research Unit focusing specifically on rural health and development issues.

Some of the organisation's objectives include informing the development of an integrated system for chronic infectious and chronic non-communicable disease care. It also includes evaluating policies and programmes such as assessments of Antiretroviral (ART) impacts, and the provision of ART through the public and private systems.

The work of the unit provides evidence for policy and planning in a number of disciplinary fields including health, social development, education and agriculture.

Chairperson of Anglo American's Chairman's Fund, Norman Mbazima concludes that the Fund's consistent support of the Agincourt Unit is influenced by the Fund's core principles.

"The Chairman's Fund is dedicated to assisting South African communities' secure sustainable futures, by supporting organisations that have the capacity to effect positive and tangible results in critical areas such as health.

"We are therefore delighted to be able to support the Agincourt Unit as through providing integrated insight into rural health and development, the organisation is helping to create more prosperous lives for several communities in need."