

Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital - a dream, a necessity a reality

Advances made towards the establishment of the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital (NMCH), with construction due to start next year, were announced today at this year's annual Children's Celebration marking the 93rd birthday of former president Nelson Mandela. This is only the fourth dedicated paediatric hospital in Africa, for a total population of approximately 447 million children.



While the operating costs of the facility are set to be covered by a public-private partnership, the NMCH Trust calls for support from private and public donors as it endeavours to raise a total of R1bn required to build the hospital.

The Children's Celebration is a standing annual event to celebrate Mandela's birthday in a manner that gives prominence to children. This year's event focused on creating awareness of the health care needs of the children of Southern Africa and highlighted advances made towards the establishment of the NMCH as an expression of Mandela's legacy.

The hospital is intended to change the face of paediatric health as the second facility dedicated to children in South Africa, after the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in the Western Cape, whose work it will complement.

Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital Trust CEO Sibongile Mkhabela said: "As a not-for-profit organisation, the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital will be a critical resource that services not only South Africa but the rest of the Southern Africa region. By offering specialised care to all children - the hospital will be able to fulfil Nelson Mandela's dream of making world-class health care available to the children of southern Africa. As an academic facility, in partnership with Wits Medical School as a primary base, and by engaging all medical training facilities in the region, we also plan to create a regional training platform that can drive best practice specialised care for paediatrics from all over southern Africa."

"The architectural design, which is intended to create a comfortable homely environment for patients and their families, is due for completion by December this year," Mkhabela added.

Trust to raise a billion

Capital costs for the children's hospital have been estimated at R1 billion, an amount which the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital Trust, chaired by Graca Machel, will raise.

Machel commented, "I have personally been entrusted to materialise Madiba's wish and make NMCH possible. We have established a board of dedicated and energetic individuals, already a huge amount of thought has been generated, and I am confident that we will be able to realise this dream."

The hospital will be a public-private partnership, in which government will partner with the NMCH Trust, as a

not-for-profit organisation, to assume the overall management of the facility, including the provision and training of health professionals. The National Department of Health has formally committed to taking care of the costs for the public patients who will be cared for at the hospital.

Director-General of Health Precious Matsoso said: "We are of the firm belief that this partnership will play a meaningful role in assisting the department to realise the objectives of reducing the burden of disease, improving health outcomes and addressing inequalities in accessing health care services."

Off to a good start

To make its share of commitment to the project and the capital fundraising efforts, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund Chair, Judge Yvonne Mokgoro handed a cheque for R42 million to the Hospital's Fundraising Committee Chair, Tito Mboweni. "The Fund has great confidence that the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital will change the way children receive health care in South Africa and are proud to support it," Judge Mokgoro said.

In addition to this generous donation, the DG Murray Trust has signalled its intent to provide R50 million towards the construction of the hospital. Mboweni said: "We are extremely pleased with the progress of the project so far. There is a severe shortage of children's hospitals in Africa, especially when compared to the likes of Canada, Germany and Australia, which boast no less than 19 children's hospitals each. We have a strong vision for the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital and believe that it will not only save young lives but give children the right to be cared for and to receive medical treatment irrespective of their social or economic status."

Mkhabela said: "The Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital Trust has been entrusted by Nelson Mandela to make his dream of a children's hospital come true. The responsibility is ours and we are incredibly pleased to have the support of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, as well as DG Murray Trust, to kick-start our fundraising and launch our public awareness campaign."

At the inception of the project in 2005, Nelson Mandela said: "A specialist dedicated children's hospital will be a credible demonstration of the commitment of African leaders to place the rights of children at the forefront - nothing less would be enough."

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