During the month when the successes of women are celebrated, the Western Cape Department of Health empowered women once more.

Non-profit organisations such as Female Health Foundation (FHF), National South African Workers Welfare (NA-SAWW), Planned Parenthood Association (PPASA) and Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) all joined hands along with the Department and the City of Cape Town in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

With the enhanced empowerment of women and the increased use of the female condom as an alternative choice to the male condom, the incidence of STIs, including HIV, is expected to decrease over a period of time.

The National Department of Health is investing more than R130m per year to ensure sufficient supplies of condoms, of highest quality SABS standards, free of charge to the public. During 2005/06 the National Department supplied 206,000 female condoms to the Western Cape.

With this initiative the department aims to:
- Promote the knowledge, wide acceptance and use of the female condom.
- Empower women to make more informed choices about their own sexual health.
- Honour women achievers, trendsetters and visionaries in their communities.
- Create a platform for mothers and daughters to discuss the equality of women and their right to control their own sexual health.

Cervical Cancer Screening Campaign

The Western Cape Department of Health identified cervical cancer screening as its most significant deliverable to form part of the Provincial Government’s Siyabulela Deliverables for 2006.

Premier Rasool has called for targets for service delivery for women to be met to coincide with National Women’s month. The Department of Health will reach its goal to do 24,500 screenings before the end of August 2006.

Cervical cancer is the most common cancer among South African women who have a one in 41 chance of developing the disease in her lifetime and provincial Department of Health offers screening at most of the primary health clinics with well trained nurses to do this very simple test.

Cervical cancer most commonly develops in women over the age of 30 and regular screening (pap smears) is an effective method of preventing cancerous development through early detection. The Provincial Department of Health’s goal is to screen 10% of the target group (women over 30 years) per year by 2010. 5.6% (45,000) of the target group was screened during 2005/06. The target for 2006/07 is 6.5% (47,828).

The Department’s aim is to meet the screening targets through:
- Sustained marketing of this service including public education and awareness programmes toward primary prevention, service uptake and follow through and improved availability of quality and culturally sensitive information, education and communication materials.
- Improved provision of resources: equipment, facilities (privacy, lighting) and well trained staff, to enhance: understanding of the policy, motivation, quality of smears, interpretation of results, record-keeping and communication - follow up with clients and between colposcopy/treatment services.
- Identification of a trained person per facility to drive implementation.