The cost of waiting

In this round, we expanded Asivikelane Health from 10 to 25 clinics by adding additional clinics from across Buffalo City and the OR Tambo district in the Eastern Cape. The major improvements in waiting times at the 10 clinics previously reported on have been sustained, with 96% of these residents reporting that they spent less than 3 hours at the clinic. However, waiting times in the 15 new clinics are particularly poor, with 67% of residents in the OR Tambo district waiting more than 2 hours to be assisted, while 58% spent more than 3 hours at the clinic in total. Some patients told us that they even forgo clinic visits and treatment because of the long wait.

Extensive waiting times come at a significant cost to residents, most of whom live in rural and impoverished conditions. They travel long distances to clinics and the prolonged wait steals time out of their day; time which could have been spent seeking work to meet their family’s needs. Residents also risk being exposed to other infections while waiting. Women and children face a specific safety risk because public transport is limited in rural areas and travelling after hours is unsafe.

Reasons for long waiting times include the lack of medicine dispensing staff, poor patient file management, nurses taking long breaks and clinics not opening on time.

There are several low or no cost ways that clinics could address these problems, such as:
1. Pre-packaging of medications for chronic patients,
2. Efficient patient file management, and
3. Appointment booking system to reduce congestion at clinics.

DATA NOTES: 248 residents were interviewed in the second week of September 2021, from across 25 clinics in the Buffalo City and OR Tambo Health Districts. Detailed results and comments from residents themselves are available at www.asivikelane.org/health.

GOOD NEWS

- Thembalethu, Potsdam, Twecu, Masiphile, Berlin and Nqanda clinics are doing excellent work across all indicators.
- Needscamp and Potsdam clinics saw a 33% and 20% improvement respectively in the availability of health services to residents over the last month.
- All residents who visited the 25 clinics reported that COVID-19 prevention measures were adhered to.

HOTSPOTS

- 30% of residents reported that Needscamp and Ncera clinics did not open on time.
- 60% of residents who visited Qhuru clinic and 30% of those who visited Ngqeleni clinic reported that medicine was not available.
- 40% of residents in Newlands and Ncera and 30% in Mpongo reported that the waiting area was not clean.