Tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in South Africa in 2018, according to Stats SA. The areas where Asivikelane Health works have amongst the highest rates of TB infection in the country. The WHO reports that COVID-19 has slowed progress in South Africa’s TB prevention, where 48% fewer people with drug-resistant TB were detected in 2020 compared with 2019. Lockdowns and hesitancy by residents to visit clinics during the pandemic led to many patients not being treated and cured of TB, which has led to increased infections. TB prevention remains critical, even as we continue to tackle COVID-19.

This month Asivikelane Health asked residents about TB prevention measures at 45 clinics. Most clinics are practising two of the three preventative measures asked about: keeping windows open in the waiting area and requiring coughing patients to wear a mask. Of concern is the fact that more than half of residents say that clinics do not have a separate waiting area for patients who are coughing.

TB prevention must be prioritised by clinics, provincial and national government, starting with:
1. Increased clinic resources for TB screening and treatment
2. Separate waiting areas at clinics for coughing patients
3. More educational resources for TB symptoms and screening.