

MORE than five million South Africans fight a daily battle against HIV and Aids, with an exponential domino effect on the stability of communities and the robustness of the economy. The trilateral partnership between Mercedes-Benz South Africa (MBSA), South African Business Coalition on HIV and Aids (Sabcoha) and Trucking Wellness today launched the twentieth Trucking Wellness Centre to fight the spread of the disease among truck drivers.

The centre was officially opened by Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi (right), who expressed his delight at the success of the project, saying that the wellness centres should be expanded to encompass all major trucking routes.

Minister Motsoaledi says: "We are fully aware of the dangers that long distance truck drivers are exposed to as a result of being away from their spouses for longer periods. It becomes important therefore that we provide them with primary healthcare services including counselling as part of minimising their risks of getting STIs (including HIV) and in turn put their spouses at risk."

He adds: "This centre puts us on a new course in the delivery of primary healthcare and prevention of HIV. I commend the South African Business Coalition on HIV and Aids and Mercedes-Benz SA for working with us in this regard."

Located along a major trucking route, the Epping Wellness Centre

## 20th Trucking Wellness Centre launched



was chosen due to its high volumes of trucking activity. As with the other 19 centres already established on routes across the nation, Epping becomes an ideal hub to reach long-distance truck drivers, women at risk as well as communities in the area. The aim of the centres is to

raise awareness and advocate testing, prevention and treatment of HIV and Aids.

MBSA, a major manufacturer and distributor of passenger cars and commercial vehicles, has a long-standing commitment to fighting HIV and Aids. The com-

pany's Workplace Programme recently celebrated a decade of successfully decreasing the infection rate among its employees. The current rate of 8% is less than half of the national rate, with a 95% testing uptake and 40% of employees re-testing annually. Of the HIV pos-

itive employees, MBSA has a five-year survival rate of 95% and a 10-year survival rate of 89% due to the vigour of this programme.

As an example of best practice sharing, the company funds the Siyakhana Project to expand the reach of this successful workplace model to small and medium enterprises in the Eastern Cape where it has its manufacturing plant. Siyakhana is also replicated to reach 12 government clinics in the East London area.

Around 40% of MBSA's corporate social investment portfolio focuses on HIV and Aids projects. The company has funded R3,58 million over a three-year period, which will be administered by Sabcoha for the running and further expansion of the Trucking Wellness Programme.

Sabcoha has been instrumental in the co-ordination of private sector response to HIV and Aids, striving to assist businesses with workplace initiatives through sharing of best practice models, pioneering new initiatives and lobbying for change.

Brad Mears, CEO of the Sabcoha says: "The launch of this Trucking Wellness Centre at Epping today shows a totally unique programme that brings together a multiplicity of partners to effectively address the impact of HIV and Aids in the trucking sector, as well as other high risk groups, such as women and sex workers, including the broader community around the trucking centre."