



# NOW YOU SEE IT

## Improving Medicine Availability in South Africa's Provinces

OPHID Trust

Health establishment workers in South Africa have challenging jobs. Every day, they receive patients in need of essential medicines. The clinicians must provide the life-saving treatment and care that these patients need in the appropriate quantities, but that's not all—they must also contend with intermittent stock shortages. Medicine availability is one of the main challenges to successful health supply chain management and health outcomes in South Africa. Sometimes, clinicians don't have the medicines that their patients need on hand. When this happens, the patients often have to come back to the health establishment on another day, which takes time and resources that they cannot always spare. For clinicians and other public primary health care (PHC) providers to ensure that they have the correct number and selection of medicines in stock to meet patients' demands, they need an accurate understanding of the need for those medicines in their provinces, districts, and sub districts, as well as an understanding of how stock shortages at other levels of the supply chain may affect their stock levels in the future.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Global Health Supply Chain Program – Technical Assistance (GHSC-TA) is building the capacity of the National Surveillance Centre (NSC) and the associated Provincial Surveillance Centre (PSC) to improve medicine visibility and availability

across South Africa. The National Department of Health conceptualized the NSC in 2015 to provide visibility of medicine availability across all levels of the public health supply chain. The NSC supports medicine availability monitoring by visualizing the medicine availability data that suppliers, provincial depots, and health establishments submit in order to inform decision-making through agreed medicine availability key performance indicators.

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*– Dashboard User*

GHSC-TA developed the dashboards as a way for the NSC and PSC licensed users to easily visualize and interpret the data on medicine availability and compare it to the NDOH's strategic objectives and day-to-day operational performance as well as to allow for the timely escalation of medicine availability-related issues

to the relevant stakeholders. The data is available for all levels of the supply chain, meaning PSC teams and other stakeholders can pinpoint challenges at the supplier, provincial depot, and health establishment levels that may impact their stock levels.

GHSC-TA didn't just create the dashboards. The program also created a training plan for users of the dashboards. According to one participant, "The dashboards have helped me to submit reports about medicine availability to my supervisor as well as to all facilities. In collaboration with facilities we can then identify stock problems on certain items and investigate whether they [the facility] still need the item, or if the items were incorrectly ordered." The NSC dashboards are a tool for pharmacists and other health establishment clinicians to better inform their decision-making around medicine availability and stock levels management.

Now, PSC users and other provincial medicine availability stakeholders are better informed on how to use the NSC dashboards to quickly resolve medicine availability issues as well as to predict and prevent future shortages. Since the trainings commenced, the number of dashboard users has steadily increased over time, contributing to improved medicine availability and therefore improved health outcomes for South Africa's most vulnerable populations, as they are increasingly able to receive their life-saving medications when and where they need them.

