

# Mercedes-Benz supports the health of the trucking sector

**T**HE campaign to contain the spread of HIV among truck drivers has been strengthened by Mercedes-Benz South Africa (MBSA) joining forces with South African Business Coalition on HIV/Aids and the Trucking Wellness initiative.

The 20th Trucking Wellness Centre was opened on 11 May in Epping, one of the busiest truck stops in the Western Cape.

As MBSA group health and safety advisor, Dr Clifford Panter explains, the programme continues to make in-roads in tackling the escalating crisis of HIV/Aids in the road freight industry through prevention, treatment and care.

The project is also poised to go international, with six countries in southern Africa targeted.

He says, "Truckers are the backbone of the road freight industry and many of them drive long-haul vehicles across the



During the official opening of the Epping Roadside Wellness Centre, Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, congratulates vice president of Mercedes-Benz South Africa commercial vehicles division, Kobus van Zyl (right) and Trevor Short, chairman of the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight and Logistics Industry.

**Trucking Wellness mobile clinics are fully equipped to screen for a variety of ailments, including HIV/Aids, and qualified nursing staff can provide primary health care.**



borders of South Africa, often being away from their families for long periods. This significantly increases the threat of infection, and makes awareness about the disease so much more important."

MBSA, a major manufacturer and distributor of passenger cars and commercial vehicles, has a long-standing

commitment to fighting HIV/Aids and Kobus van Zyl, vice president of the company's commercial vehicles division, says: "Where do you draw the line between the products we manufacture and the people who use our products? MBSA is a leading manufacturer, and we take our commitment to our customers and communities

very seriously. The Trucking Wellness programme is a prime example of this dedication."

While the bulk of the South African programme is centred around 20 busy truck stops along the main transport routes, the expansion into southern Africa will see mobile clinics, in the form of Mercedes-Benz vans, stationed at

trucking company depots. They will provide advocacy and screening facilities for HIV, TB and malaria, as well as general wellness testing

Services are not exclusively for truckers, but are also extended to vulnerable communities living around the wellness centres, including sex workers who are drawn to the truck

stops to ply their trade.

HIV/Aids will remain a top priority on the social investment agenda. About 40 percent of the annual corporate social investment budget is allocated to projects aimed at advocacy, prevention and support for those affected and infected with the disease.

In addition to funding com-

munity HIV/Aids projects, the company has also prioritised the wellness of its employees for more than a decade, through its robust Workplace Programme.

The current infection rate amongst staff is less than half of the national rate. Free access for all employees and family members to anti-retroviral

treatment since 1999, a first for corporate SA, has resulted in 95 percent five-year survival and 89 percent 10-year survival of employees on anti-retrovirals. This benchmark programme has received numerous national and international accolades over the years.

Van Zyl says the company's commitment has shown that a proactive and comprehensive approach to HIV/Aids works best. "When it comes to a problem that has such wide-reaching effect, we will only make a lasting difference by sharing experience and knowledge.

"With the ongoing support of everyone involved at the Trucking Wellness project, from the care givers to the co-ordinators and managers, this project will continue to grow as a model for others to follow, expanding the network of Trucking Wellness Centres and the number of beneficiaries whose lives we can change."