

Volkswagen to convert factory into Covid-19 medical facility

Volkswagen Group South Africa (VWSA) is to convert its assembly plant in PE into a temporary medical facility for Covid-19 patients after signing a partnership with Germany's government.



Source: Supplied



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The facility, that is in Neave (Korsten, Port Elizabeth), could accommodate up to 4,000 beds once it is fully operational. This would also include high-acuity patients who require oxygenation.

The planned conversion of the 66,000m² building is the result of a collaboration formed between VWSA, the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber, the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and the Eastern Cape Department of Health.

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development will provide funding of R107m to support the conversion of the plant as well as the procurement of protective gear for staff at regional tertiary hospitals, regional primary care clinics and 49 Covid-19 test centres.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH will provide the performance framework to account for the public and private engagement and will foster the cooperation with the private sector to establish a sustainable strategic alliance in Nelson Mandela Bay.

VWSA will contribute R28m to the project. Additionally, VWSA will provide project management for the conversion of the facility and management of the procurement of the critical Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

The plant will be made available to the government until March 2021, with the Department of Health and the NMBM responsible for the management and daily operations of the facility. The Business Chamber's role has been to assist in facilitating the project and garnering further support from its membership base.

The facility is to be completed in phases and handed over to the government as the need for medical care in the metro develops. The preparation of the first phase is currently ongoing and will take approximately six to eight weeks to complete.

VWSA has also been working on the manufacture of ventilators, respirators and masks in partnership with other local businesses and has offered ongoing support to the Business Chamber and the Municipality in their coordinated efforts to bolster medical care in Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

Thomas Schaefer, VWSA chairman and managing director, says: "VWSA has devoted its time to finding innovative ways in which we can combat the scourge of Covid-19 and prepare the metro to care for those who are infected. We are highly appreciative of the financial support from the BMZ/GIZ as it will help us to continue to offer support to protect our citizens and our country."

Dr Gerd Müller, the German minister for economic cooperation and development, commented: "We will either beat Covid-19 worldwide together or not at all. That is why I support Volkswagen South Africa's plan to turn a currently unused factory into a facility for Covid-19 patients. Our contribution forms part of our worldwide Emergency Covid-19 Support Programme."

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