

VWSA completes and hands over phase one of Covid-19 facility

Volkswagen Group South Africa (VWSA) handed over the first phase of its Covid-19 temporary medical facility to the Eastern Cape Department of Health on 23 June, just seven weeks after announcing that it would convert one of its factories to a medical facility.



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VWSA announced on 5 May that they would make their former Port Elizabeth plant situated in Neave available as an overflow facility to provide care for those diagnosed with Covid-19. With funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), VWSA has since completed the first phase of equipping this facility, which can now accommodate 1,485 patients including high-acuity patients who require oxygenation.

Once the second and third phases are complete, in accordance with the Department of Health's standard operating procedures for field hospitals, the facility could accommodate more than 3,300 beds for patients.

The conversion of this 66,000m² building is the result of a collaboration between VWSA, the Eastern Cape Department of Health, the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber. BMZ provided funding of €5.2m (R100m).

A performance framework for the project was developed by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. The Business Chamber assisted in facilitating the project, while the Department of Health will be responsible for running the facility, with support from the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality.

Aside from managing the process of equipping the facility, VWSA contributed €1.3m (R25m) for the facility as well as the procurement of protective gear for staff at regional tertiary hospitals, regional primary care clinics and Covid-19 test centres.

Of the funding, €600,000 (R11m) will also be used in support of the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) branch in Port Elizabeth, which is responsible for the majority of Covid-19 testing in the metro.



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"We have learned that collaboration is key when facing an unprecedented threat such as Covid-19," says Thomas Schaefer, chairman and managing director of VWSA.

"This pandemic requires us to act decisively and with speed. VWSA has answered this call by completing and delivering phase 1 of the medical facility at the time when it is desperately needed by our metro which is currently experiencing an alarming increase of infections. We are honoured to be able to provide this facility so our communities can receive the care they need during this difficult period of our lifetime.

The Premier of the Eastern Cape, Lubabalo Mabuyane, revealed that the hospital will be named the Rev. Dr Elizabeth Mamisa Chabula-Nxiweni Field Hospital. This name was chosen in honour of Rev. Dr Chabula-Nxiweni, a retired Port Elizabeth doctor and vocal advocate for safe circumcision during initiation ceremonies. Dr Chabula-Nxiweni is also a Presbyterian minister, a former Nelson Mandela Bay Municipal health chief and a pioneer in caring for young initiates who have suffered as a result of unsafe circumcision practices.

Mabuyane said the provincial government would provide healthcare workers to work at the new field hospital and its pharmacy. "The German government and VWSA have shown their good hearts in answering this call for international solidarity. This investment in human beings came at the right time. It's a very progressive way of ploughing back into the community where you are doing business.

Dr Gerd Müller, the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, commented: "This contribution is part of our global Emergency Covid-19 Support Programme to help expand health infrastructure in developing countries, ensure food security and stabilise crisis and refugee regions. This support is needed because the coronavirus has not only caused a global health crisis; it has also led to a dramatic food and economic crisis. We all must realise that we either beat Covid-19 worldwide or not at all."

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