

MEDIA STATEMENT

Issued by the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities

Attention: Journalists and News Editors

Sunday: 1 February 2026

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MINISTER CHIKUNGA CAUTIONS YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE IMPACT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

PRETORIA: The Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Ms Sindisiwe Chikunga, is cautioning young people against the growing scourge of substance abuse, warning that it continues to threaten their health, safety, education, and long-term contribution to the socio-economic development of the country.

Minister Chikunga said substance abuse remains one of the most serious challenges confronting South Africa's youth, as it contributes to school dropouts, unemployment, crime, mental health challenges, and gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF).

The Minister emphasises that young people are among the most vulnerable groups, as they are prone to dependence on substances such as alcohol and drugs, particularly in communities affected by poverty, unemployment, inequality, and limited access to recreational and economic opportunities.

This often results in a range of problems, including: academic difficulties, health-related problems such as mental health illnesses, poor peer relationships, conflicts with the law, and a high rate of accidents. These problems also harm family members, the community, and the entire society. "Substance abuse robs young people of their potential and undermines the future of our country. It fuels violence, weakens families, destroys communities, and places enormous pressure on social services," said Minister Chikunga.

As part of the government's response, the Department of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities will continue to work with the Central Drug Authority, the Department of Social Development, the Department of Health, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organisations in strengthening Prevention Programmes, Awareness Campaigns, and Psychosocial Support Services.

“We cannot speak about youth development without addressing the devastating role that drugs and alcohol play in perpetuating abuse, crime and hopelessness. Prevention must start early, and it must involve individual youth, their families, schools, faith-based organisations and communities,” she added.

The Minister called on young people to make informed and responsible choices and to seek help when facing addiction challenges. She also encouraged young people to actively participate in positive initiatives that reduce risky behaviours and promote healthy living.

“Our youth must understand that saying no to drugs is saying yes to life, dignity and opportunity. We urge young people to become champions of change and to protect themselves and their peers by resisting the temptations of abusing dependency-creating substances,” concludes Minister Chikunga.

The Department reaffirmed its commitment to advancing youth empowerment, social cohesion and community safety, in line with the National Development Plan, the National Youth Policy and the government’s National Drug Master Plan.

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