

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Entered into by and between



**SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL RESEARCH
COUNCIL (MRC)**

AND



**THE NATIONAL HOUSE OF TRADITIONAL
LEADERS (NHTL)**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides for the recognition of the institution of traditional leadership, its status and role according to customary law. The Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 is the formal legislation that was formulated to enhance indigenous leadership systems in the country and give them the recognition and status that they deserve. Currently it is estimated that more than a third of the South African population resides in areas that are governed under the jurisdiction of traditional leadership. Additionally a significant number of urban dwellers still show allegiance to their traditional leaders. This is done through seasonal travel to their home villages as well as sending their children back home to undergo traditional rituals in the place of their parent's birth.

Traditional leaders play a critical role in their communities in overseeing a number of issues such as

- Safety and security in their communities
- Community development
- Handling of disputes and complaints
- Issues of land allocation
- Moral regeneration
- Initiation ceremonies and practices

The Health Promotion Research & Development Unit of the Medical Research Council has a long history of collaboration with traditional leaders, which started over five years ago first with the Eastern Cape House of traditional leaders. Through this partnership the unit has been able to conduct health research in rural communities, focusing on disease prevention, culture and health, community development, youth issues and traditional initiation including circumcision. This work has grown to expand towards working with all the houses in the 9 provinces including formulating a formal partnership with the National House of Traditional Leaders(NHTL). The research focus area of the Health Promotion Unit deals with engaging communities prior to the occurrence of disease through prevention and promoting life enhancing behaviours. Traditional indigenous knowledge systems have always been focused towards prevention of illness and thus based on similar ethos as those of the science of Health Promotion. A partnership between the Health Promotion R &D Unit and the NHTL will go a long way in strengthening some of these age old methods of prevention which can be revived in order to promote resilience amongst South African communities.

From this partnership with the ECHTL we are at final stage of preparing a technical report that will assist in improving the practice of initiation in the Eastern Cape. As this work grows as part of our partnership with traditional leaders nationally we will be able to provide valuable knowledge towards improving the health of both men and women in South Africa.