

MASSACHUSETTS-SOUTHAFRICA HEALTH TASK FORCE

OVERVIEW 2002

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Howard Koh, MD, MPH,
Commissioner,
Massachusetts Department
of Public Health, *Chair*

John Cunningham, PhD,
Deputy Provost, University
of Massachusetts at Amherst

Felton Earls, MD, Professor,
Harvard Medical School

**Lynn Eckhart, MD, Vice-
Chancellor/ Dean, Center
for International Health,
University of Massachusetts
Medical School**

**Elmer Freeman, Executive
Director, Center for
Community Health
Research and Service**

**Anna Faith Jones, President
Emeritus, Boston
Foundation**

**Paul Jacobsen, Chief Secretary,
Office of the Governor**

**Temba Maqubela, Board
Member, South Africa
Partners**

**Byron Rushing, Massachusetts
State Representative**

**Valerie Stone, MD,
Massachusetts General
Hospital**

**William Walczak, Executive
Director, Codman Square
Health Center**

**Marti Wilson-Taylor,
President & CEO, YWCA
Boston**

**Hilary Worthen, MD,
Cambridge Health Alliance**

BRIEF HISTORY

From 1965 through 1990, the state of Massachusetts actively supported South Africa's democratic movement to end apartheid. Citizens of the Commonwealth engaged in multi-level collaborations with anti-apartheid groups, while state government supported divestment legislation, and institutions of higher education provided support for academic scholarships and other training efforts. Recognizing the important role played by many in Massachusetts, Mr. Nelson Mandela included Boston as one of the stops he made on his first US visit in 1990.

In 1994, Massachusetts began taking steps towards the formalization of support for the newly elected government of South Africa, and a year later, Governor William Weld led a trade mission to South Africa. In 1997 he signed a Sister State/Province Agreement between the Province of the Eastern Cape and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that prioritized the development of academic relationships, economic development programs, private investment and community partnerships.

Following the Governor's lead, Dr. Howard K. Koh, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) took steps to develop a bi-lateral relationship in the area of public health, and in 1998 signed a letter of cooperation with the Eastern Cape Department of Health (ECDOH). As part of this effort, the Commissioner established the **Massachusetts – South Africa Health Task Force** in April 2000 to support government-to-government activities and mutually beneficial collaborations.

During its first two years of operation, the Task Force has outlined three broad areas in which potential collaborations are considered.

- Support for the development of the provincial Department of Health's capacity to survey, plan for, resource, and manage the delivery of public health and medical services in the province;
- Support for and projects with the medical school and the University of Transkei (Unitra) in Umtata in its evolving collaborative efforts with the region's district and local health departments and the NGO sector. (*Unitra is the site of a crucial historically black medical school*);
- Assistance to selective non-governmental organizations (NGO) whose goals and activities are of mutual public health interest to the Province and to collaborators here in Massachusetts.

In order to carry out its program, the Task Force has established three groups - the Academic Working Group, NGO Working Group, and the Departmental Working Group – which develop and support program activities. The Task Force is also committed to supporting the activities of industry and trade partners seeking to improve health care in South Africa.

Highlights from the Working Groups' 18 months of operation include:

ACADEMIC WORKING GROUP:

- Hosted video teleconference with Unitra faculty and identified preliminary priorities including student and faculty exchanges; joint research; and the further development of telemedicine and informatics capacity.
- University of Massachusetts Medical Center – Unitra HIV/AIDS research lab entered its fourth year – team will be working in Eastern Cape from June - August 2002.
- With the help of working group members, a Unitra faculty member has been selected as an international fellow by the Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research in Pennsylvania.
- Collaboration initiated between the Massachusetts General Hospital Institute for Health Professions and the Unitra Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences in order to explore adaptation of MGH/IHP clinical research curriculum for Unitra's use.

NGO WORKING GROUP:

- An Eastern Cape Health NGO Survey was conducted from October – November 2001, in order to identify potential partners and areas of need.
- Codman Square Health Center and Masimanyane Women's Support Center signed the first formal NGO twinning agreement on March 8, 2002.
- Center for Community Health Education, Research and Services (CCHERS) and Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) of Unitra are identifying mutual interest and exploring possibility of a twinning agreement.
- Initial meeting between the Cambridge Health Alliance (a Harvard affiliated teaching hospital) and the Port Elizabeth Health Complex to explore potential areas of collaboration and exchange.

DEPARTMENTAL WORKING GROUP:

- Released *Building Bridges Report* (produced by the Health Delegation that traveled to the Eastern Cape) at the American Public Health Association conference November 2000.
- Consulted with National Department of Health and hosted three Eastern Cape Department of Health senior officials in June 2001 who, together with MDPH officials, outlined priority areas for collaboration.
- Hosted Eastern Cape HIV/AIDS Director and staff in October/November 2001 to map out collaborations.
- MDPH AIDS Bureau provided technical support to Unitra for its proposal submission to the World AIDS Foundation.
- Commissioner Koh hosted an October 2001 Dean's Breakfast meeting attended by 20 representatives from 17 schools of medicine, public health, nursing pharmacy, and dentistry in Massachusetts.

The Task Force and MDPH have created a unique relationship that is the only one of its kind in the United States. Many here and in South Africa believe it will be a model health partnership others across the country and internationally will emulate as they seek to support South Africa's democratic development.

For more information, contact South Africa Partners, 617-482-1317 or visit our website at www.sapartners.org

“Partnership with the international community is vital. A constant theme in all our messages has been that in this inter-dependent and globalized world, we have indeed again become the keepers of our brothers and sisters.”

Nelson Mandela at the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa, July 2000