

EC to unveil Provincial Drug Master Plan on Monday

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The Eastern Cape Social Development will unveil its Provincial Drug Master Plan at a launch event in Cala on Monday.

The launch of the Master Plan will coincide with UN's International Day Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

Department spokesperson, Mzukisi Solani, said the Plan was a response to what they see as a drug and substance abuse epidemic, particularly among teenagers in the Eastern Cape.

He said the Provincial Drug Master Plan was developed in partnership with various stakeholders.

"The high rate of substance abuse in the Eastern Cape manifests its negative effects on the youth (in and out of school). This situation has resulted to the increase of social ills such as high rate of crime (rape, domestic violence) school dropouts, and maternal and child mortality through high prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and other conditions," said Solani.

He said that alcohol was the dominant substance of abuse in the Eastern Cape.

"For example, a recent study by the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR), one out of every ten Grade 1 learners in some parts of the province have been born with the consequences of their mothers' drinking during pregnancy," he said.

"Many Eastern Cape women start to drink alcohol at ages as young as ten years old and the area now has the highest reported rate of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in the world."

"Thirteen percent of Grade One learners in the Nelson Mandela Bay areas of Bethelsdorp and Helenvale have been diagnosed with FASD. The FARR study was commissioned by the Eastern Cape Liquor Board in 2013, and will continue through to this year," said Solani.

He said in response to the devastation, Social Development MEC, Nancy Sihlwayi, established a Provincial Substance Abuse Forum. "The forum encompasses various provincial stakeholders. It was tasked into crafting a provincial blueprint to guide the war against substance abuse and illicit drugs," he said.

Solani said the goal of the Provincial Drug Master Plan goal is to reduce the social burden and health impact caused by substance abuse in the Eastern Cape, through the provision of mechanisms aimed at demand, supply as well as harm reduction.