

JANUARY – MARCH 2025

TEBELOPELE HEALTH UNPACKED **Q1 NEWSLETTER**



**Wellness for All,
Then, Now, Always**

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Editors Note



Welcome to the 2025 Q1 edition of the Tebelopele Health Unpacked Newsletter, where we bring you the latest updates, insights, and real life stories from across our network. Across Tebelopele, we've witnessed remarkable shifts and renewed commitments to the people we serve.

This period of change is not just about adapting, but about intentionally evolving to meet the needs of our communities with greater impact and purpose. At Tebelopele, we remain steadfast in our commitment to providing accessible, stigma-free, and quality health services across Botswana.

From our urban centers to the most remote corners of the country, our teams are dedicated to ensuring that no one is left behind.

In this issue, you'll find a curated collection of articles, features, and highlights designed to inform, inspire, and connect you to initiatives shaping lives across the country. We celebrate our shared achievements, recognize the strength of our partnerships, and offer a glimpse into the impactful initiatives that have taken root this quarter.

We also extend our sincere gratitude to the many stakeholders and partners who continue to join us on this journey. Together, we are not just delivering services but restoring dignity, building resilience, and transforming lives.

We value your feedback and invite you to share your thoughts, questions, and ideas with us, as your voice helps shape the future of our work.

Thank you for being part of our community. We look forward to sharing more exciting news and updates with you.

Happy reading.

Kago Ngwato

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*An Instinct
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Sit Down With The Executive Director– International Women's Month Edition



March marks International Women's Month, a global celebration of the remarkable contributions women have made across all spheres of life. It is a time to reflect on the strides taken toward gender equality and to reaffirm our commitment to creating a more inclusive future.

As a proudly woman-led organization, we had the honour of sitting down with the Executive Director, Dr. Gaone Makwinja, to discuss the significance of this month and gain insight into her journey and perspective as a woman in leadership.

Tebelopele plays a key role in advancing public health services. How is the organization working to address women's health challenges, particularly in HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health?

"Tebelopele plays a pivotal role in advancing public health services in Botswana, particularly in addressing women's health challenges related to HIV prevention, care and sexual reproductive health. As the largest provider of HIV Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) in the country, Tebelopele has developed a network of centres that significantly expands access to essential health services. This is especially critical for women, who face heightened vulnerability to HIV due to biological and socio-economic factors, in a country where one in five adults lives with the virus. By offering these services, Tebelopele ensures that women can make informed decisions about their health. Knowing their HIV status allows them to access timely treatment if needed or take steps to protect themselves and their partners, reducing transmission rates.

Beyond HIV prevention, Tebelopele addresses women's broader sexual and reproductive health needs by providing information and access to contraceptive methods, to help women prevent unintended pregnancies, which is particularly important in reducing maternal health risks and HIV transmission to newborns. TWC also provides family planning education to empower women to plan their families, aligning reproductive choices with their health and socio-economic circumstances. This holistic support not only reduces the risks of HIV and unintended pregnancies but also contributes to broader public health goals in Botswana by improving health outcomes for women, who are a key demographic in the fight against HIV.

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As a young woman in a leadership position, what challenges have you faced in your journey, and how do you inspire other women to take up leadership roles in the health sector?

As a young woman in a leadership position within the health sector, I've encountered several distinct challenges on my journey, many of which stem from the unique obstacles women face in traditionally male-dominated fields. Early in my career, I often faced unconscious bias and stereotypes that questioned my competence due to my age and gender. There was a recurring assumption that being a young woman meant I had less experience or capability compared to my male peers. This created a pressure to constantly prove myself, often requiring me to work harder to earn the same level of respect. As an example, the biggest struggle is balancing assertiveness with approachability, being decisive enough to lead effectively without being labelled 'aggressive'. The health sector is inherently demanding, with long hours and high-stakes responsibilities. As a young leader, I felt an expectation to always be available, which clashed with societal pressures around women's roles outside of work including being a partner to someone and a mother. Striking a balance was challenging and still is, and setting boundaries often comes with guilt, as I navigate both professional ambitions and personal expectations.

Gender Equality in Healthcare: What steps can be taken to ensure that healthcare services are more inclusive and accessible to women, especially those in marginalized communities?



To ensure healthcare services are more inclusive and accessible to women, particularly those in marginalized communities, a multifaceted approach is necessary to address the unique barriers they face. Some of the approaches that I think could be considered includes expanding availability by building more health facilities in the marginalized regions to reduce travel distances, utilizing mobile clinics to reach remote or rural communities and leveraging telemedicine to provide virtual consultations, especially where physical infrastructure is unavailable or non-existent.

Mental health is an often-overlooked aspect of women's well-being. How is Tebelopele integrating mental health support into its services for women?

Mental health is indeed a critical yet frequently neglected component of women's well-being. Recognizing that mental well-being is inseparable from overall health, Tebelopele has evolved from its initial focus on HIV testing and counselling to adopt a holistic approach that meets the unique emotional and psychological needs of women.

Tebelopele embeds mental health care within its integrated healthcare offerings. Women accessing services such as HIV testing, family planning, or STI screening receive counselling from trained professionals that addresses not only their physical health but also their emotional and psychological states. This integrated model ensures that mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, stress-related illnesses, and the emotional challenges tied to reproductive health or life transitions are screened for and provided with individualized support.

As we celebrate International Women's Month, what is your message to young women aspiring to make an impact in healthcare and leadership?

To encourage and empower other women to take up leadership roles, I advocate for workplace policies that make leadership more accessible to women, such as flexible hours or remote work options. These changes help alleviate some of the work-life balance pressures that might otherwise discourage women from pursuing demanding roles in healthcare. I would like to remind young women that leadership isn't about conforming to a traditional mold. Instead, it's about leveraging your individual strengths whether that's empathy, resilience, or innovation to make an impact. This mindset shift can build confidence in those hesitant to step into leadership.

Through mentorship, advocacy, and visibility, I strive to inspire other women in the health sector to pursue leadership roles, showing them that these challenges can be navigated and that their presence in these positions is both valuable and transformative.

By-Gothusaone Ethan Maoto
Marketing Officer



By Mpho Leonard, ICT & Informatics Manager

TWC Steps Into The Future With New Health Information System

In a significant stride toward digital transformation, Tebelopele Wellness Center (TWC) has successfully developed and piloted a state-of-the-art Health Information System (HIS) built in-house using the globally recognized DHIS2 platform.

The development of this innovative system began in May 2024, driven by TWC's commitment to enhancing data management, improving service delivery, and supporting informed decision-making through reliable and timely health information. DHIS2 is a secure, web-based system hosted internally at TWC, accessible exclusively to authorized users.

One of the key advantages of this system is its versatility, it's not limited to web browsers. The Health Information System can also be accessed through an application, providing healthcare workers with the ability to capture and manage data even in remote areas. While the app requires an internet connection for initial login and periodic data synchronization, it allows users to continue working offline, ensuring uninterrupted service delivery as we deliver outreach clinical services to the community.

The system underwent a pilot phase from November to December 2024 at five TWC centers: Selibe Phikwe, Kasane, Maun, Ghanzi, and Jwaneng

Following the successful completion of the pilot, these sites have now fully adopted the DHIS2 system for data collection and reporting. This digitization effort marks a major milestone for TWC, paving the way for expanded implementation across more centers in the future. The move to a digital platform ensures more efficient data management, enhanced reporting capabilities, and ultimately, better health outcomes for the communities TWC serves.

Stay tuned for more updates as TWC continues to lead the way in health service innovation.



Impact Of US Funding Freeze On HIV Programmes In Botswana

Immediate Risks and Disruptions

- **Termination of CSO Funding:** Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) received termination letters on 27 February, leading to significant disruptions in HIV services.
- **Service Disruptions:** The closure of drop-in centers for key populations has disrupted HIV testing, treatment, care, and support services. There are challenges in referring clients to government facilities, as service providers are no longer working, and there has been no proper handover of client files.
- **Confusion Among Clients:** The lack of reliable information and guidance has led to confusion and reluctance among clients to access services at other health facilities.

Politically Relevant Updates

- **Government Response:** The Ministry of Health has assured clients of continued access to ART services and encouraged CSOs to refer clients to government facilities. A task team, including the Ministry of Health, NAHPA, CSOs, and UN agencies (represented by UNAIDS), has been established to monitor the impact of the stop work order.
- **EU Budget Cuts:** While the EU ambassador confirmed drastic budget cuts in development financing, they pledged to fulfill their HIV commitments up to 2027. However, these funds will not bridge the gap left by the US Government funding cuts.

Community Impacts

- **Civil Society Resilience:** Despite the challenges, CSOs have shown resilience by conducting rapid surveys to assess the impact of the stop work order. They are part of a multi-stakeholder task team and are actively participating in platforms facilitated by UNAIDS to discuss implications and share updates.
- **UN Support:** UNAIDS has been proactive in convening meetings with CSOs and facilitating discussions on the way forward. The UN country team and JUTA have been collectively discussing the implications, although there is still limited information on the next steps.



By UNAIDS



CLIENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT SURVEY!

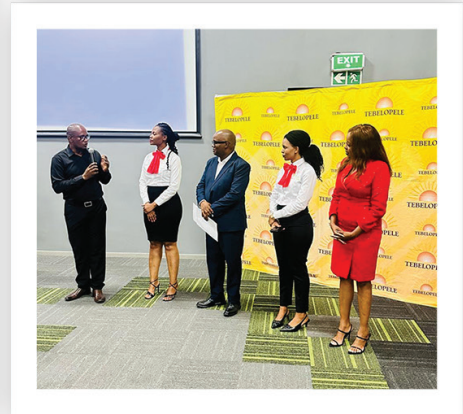
We're conducting a survey and your input
would be appreciated. Every voice matter,
especially yours!



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TWC Kasane Hosts A Successful Valentine's Dinner To Promote Couples' Health And Wellness



By Dyton Seanego, Counsellor

In a vibrant show of community partnership and commitment to health and wellness, Tebelopele Wellness Centre (TWC) Kasane hosted a special Valentine's Dinner on the 14th of February 2025 at the modern, TraveLodge Hotel. The event brought together couples, stakeholders, and members of the local business community to mark the occasion with a meaningful message about love, mutual care, and wellness.

The evening provided an important platform to highlight key relationship and health issues, with discussions centred around the importance of couples testing for HIV together, addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) within relationships, and promoting adherence to HIV treatment for those on care. Guests enjoyed not only a memorable dinner but also valuable conversations that emphasized the role of strong, healthy partnerships in building resilient communities.

Among the guests in attendance were the Executive Director of Tebelopele Wellness Center, Dr. Gaone Makwinja, as well as key valuable stakeholders and representatives from Chobe District Health Management Team (DHMT), the Gender Affairs

Office, District Commissioner's Office, and Social & Community Development (S&CD). The activity was generously supported by Gender Affairs office, the District AIDS Coordinator (DAC), and Chobe DHMT.

TWC Kasane extended its sincere appreciation to the stakeholders and members of the business community who supported the Couples HIV Testing Campaign. Notable supporters also include the TraveLodge Hotel, Cresta Mowana Safari Resort & Spa, Thebe River Safari Lodge, Spar, Two Rivers Lodge, and Wild View Hotel.

The successful event served as a testament to the strength of collaboration in promoting community health education, fostering open dialogue, and creating safe spaces for couples to discuss matters of wellness and relationship care. Tebelopele Wellness Center Kasane remains committed to leading initiatives that encourage informed, healthy, and empowered communities.

The Unspoken Hour: Why Saying “I’m Going To Therapy” At Work Still Feels Risky



By Botlhe Eva Ntsinyane, Consultant

Have you ever paused before telling your manager: **“I need to step out for an hour – I have a therapy session ?”**

I have. And I know I’m not alone.

It seems like such a simple statement. Yet for many employees, at one point – it feels like walking a tightrope. Not because we’re ashamed of prioritizing our mental health, but because the workplace isn’t always the safest space to say it out loud.

Let’s talk about why that is case and what both employers and employees can do to shift this narrative.

The Invisible Barrier: Why It’s Hard

For years, therapy has sat quietly in the background of many people’s lives; a whispered conversation, an excuse masked as “an appointment,” or something scheduled during lunch breaks to avoid suspicion.

Even in progressive workplaces, asking for just one hour a week to see a therapist can feel like asking for too much. Why?

Because:

- We’re afraid of being perceived as weak or “not coping.”
- We’re concerned that seeking therapy might be linked to poor performance or instability.
- Some of us worry our private struggles could be weaponized during promotions or appraisals.
- Or worse, we fear being pitied or treated with kid gloves.

And this fear isn’t unfounded.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, 40% of employees worry about retaliation if they seek mental health care. Only 13% feel comfortable talking about mental health at work. Even in companies with wellness programs, uptake is often low due to stigma. (Sources: American Psychiatric Association, WHO, Spill Mental Health Report)

A friendly Call to Employers: Psychological Safety Is Good Business

Mental health conversations at work are not just about being kind, they’re about being smart.

When employees feel safe to be honest about their needs:

- They are more likely to remain with the company longer.
- They show higher levels of engagement and performance.
- Absenteeism decreases and productivity increases.
- It promotes a culture of authenticity, reducing burnout and turnover.

According to the World Health Organization, 12 billion working days are lost globally each year to depression and anxiety – costing businesses over \$1 trillion annually. Creating space for mental well-being is a strategic leadership imperative. It’s not just about wellness apps or annual “mental health days.” It’s about everyday openness – where someone can say “I have therapy” as casually as they’d say “I have physio.”

Let’s Reflect: Have You Ever Had to Hide Your Healing?

To everyone reading this – especially those navigating therapy, coaching, grief counselling, or any kind of mental health support – I invite you to reflect:

- Have you ever needed time off for mental health support but hesitated to ask?
- What words did you use instead of “therapy”?
- How did your employer respond (if you told them)?
- What would it mean to feel truly safe, respected, and seen in your workplace?

These are the questions that help us shift culture; not through policies alone, but through people.

Let’s Do Better – Together

Our workplaces should be places of belonging, not just productivity. Therapy is not a sign of weakness; it’s a brave, proactive choice. Employees should not have to shrink their healing to fit into outdated ideas of professionalism.

Brianna Wiest says “True self-care is not bath salts and chocolate cake, it’s making the decision to build a life you don’t need to regularly escape from.”

I’d love to hear from you:

- Have you ever shared your therapy journey at work?
- What made it easy or difficult?
- What advice would you give to employers and HR leaders?

Let’s keep this conversation going. Your voice matters

Chobe Gentlemen's Affair: A Commitment To Positive Change

On Saturday 22nd of March 2025, Tebelopele Wellness Center (TWC) Kasane participated in the Gentlemen's Affair Chobe event, hosted at the Mowana African Village.

This impactful gathering brought together over 250 men to engage in crucial conversations about issues that affect our communities, families, and individual well-being.

Key discussions centered on addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) by challenging harmful norms and promoting respectful, non-violent relationships.

The forum further discussed mental health, encouraging open conversations and support for men facing mental health challenges.

This gathering additionally reinforced the importance of regular HIV testing and proactive health management while advocating for positive masculinity. Tebelopele remains committed to fostering healthier, safer, and more empowered communities.



By Dyton Seanego, Counsellor

It is through initiatives like these that we can break barriers, shift mindsets, and create a future where men play an active role in positive change. Special thanks to all the organizers, speakers, and attendees who made this event a success. Let's continue the conversation and turn these discussions into action!



Tebelopele College Participates In The Botswana Human Resource Development Skills & Career Clinics 2025



By Gothusaone Ethan Maoto, Marketing Officer

Tebelopele College Showcases Growth at the Botswana HRDC Skills Fair

As part of our continued commitment to bridge gaps in the education system through Tebelopele College, particularly in the healthcare sector, Tebelopele College (TC) proudly attended the Botswana Human Resource Development Skills Fair & Career Clinics, held from 25–28 March 2025 in Gaborone.

This year's fair was particularly exciting as we proudly introduced our newly launched Diploma in Rehabilitation Counselling, the highest-level qualification offered by the college to date. The diploma marks a

major step forward in our commitment to developing skilled professionals who will contribute meaningfully to the healthcare industry. The Diploma in Rehabilitation Counselling program requires a minimum of 30 points for self-sponsorship and a minimum of 36 points for government sponsorship with recruitment currently underway and semester 1 lectures scheduled to commence in August 2025.

Alongside the diploma program, we also showcased our range of TC short courses, which include Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety, Phlebotomy, Pharmacy Assistant (PHA), Health Care Assistant (HCA), Basic HIV Counselling and Testing,

Rapid HIV Testing, and Health and Wellness. All short courses require applicants to hold a Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) or equivalent qualification to explore various career paths within the healthcare sector.

Adding to the vibrant spirit at the event, some of our students also joined us at the fair, to connect with prospective students, gaining exposure, engaging with various stakeholders, and proudly representing Tebelopele College.

We remain dedicated to expanding opportunities and empowering our learners to unlock their full potential.

The Power Of Couple HIV Testing

Facing HIV Together: A New Approach to Prevention and Care

Getting tested for HIV is an essential step in preventing the spread of HIV and ensuring access to treatment. Testing can also be an important component of routine healthcare for individuals and couples alike.

In Botswana, many couples live in sero-discordant relationships- where one partner is HIV positive and the other is not. Unfortunately, HIV status disclosure rates following individual testing remains low due to individual and social barriers including:

- Social stigma
- Fear of rejection and/or divorce
- Intimate partner violence (IPV)

These challenges hamper HIV sero-status notification and discourage partners from testing together. However, couple HIV testing services facilitates mutual disclosure, increases condom use and decreases heterosexual transmission of HIV in sero discordant couples. Couple HIV testing has proven as an effective intervention to reduce HIV transmission in discordant couples.

Key Benefits of Couple HIV Testing Services

- Provides opportunity for mutual disclosure of HIV status in an environment where support can be provided by a counsellor.
- Decisions about prevention, accessing treatment, care and support, and family planning options can be made together.
- Risk-reduction messages can be tailored depending on the outcome of the test results of both partners.

The range and mix of HIV prevention interventions include but are not limited to, education on the ABCs of prevention (abstinence/delayed sexual initiation, faithfulness to one's sexual partner, reduction in the number of sexual partners, and correct and consistent condom use), treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), routine HIV testing, prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT), safe blood supplies and addressing discrimination and stigmatization.

Couple vs Partner Testing

Couples HIV Testing Services is as an HIV prevention intervention in which two or more partners are counselled, tested and receive their HIV results together. When couples receive their results together, there is mutual disclosure of HIV status, and the couple can receive appropriate support and

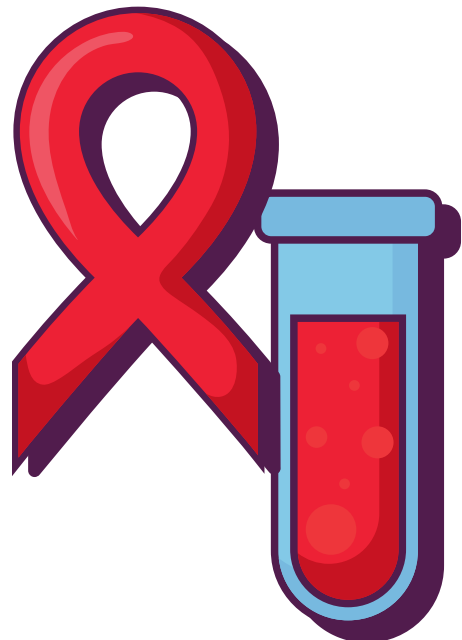


By Boineelo Diseko, Senior Technical Officer (HTS)

be linked to follow-up services by a counsellor.

Partner testing is a type of HIV testing and counselling in which one partner has already been tested, and the other partner is then tested separately. Mutual disclosure, however, is not guaranteed in partner testing as it is with couple HIV testing services.

Wherever possible, mutual disclosure under the guidance of a counsellor should be encouraged to foster trust, improve health outcomes, and strengthen relationships.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's): HIV Testing

Where can I get tested for HIV?

All our Tebelopele Wellness Centres provide HIV testing. We are based in 22 districts; Gaborone, Molepolole, Francistown, Lobatse, Good hope, Mochudi, Kanye, Tsabong, Nata, Shakawe, Bobonong, Masunga, Tutume, Serowe, Mahalapye, Palapye, Maun, Lethakane, Kasane, Ghanzi, Selebi Phikwe, and Jwaneng.

Who is eligible for HIV Testing at Tebelopele?

Anyone of consenting age regardless of religious beliefs, sexual orientation, nationality, or colour

How often can I test for HIV?

In general, it is recommended that everyone get an HIV test at least once in their lifetime as part of a health assessment. However, the risk factors present in each person's life change the recommended frequency for testing.

If you are first time tester and your test results are HIV negative, you may need to do another test after 3 months as a confirmatory test.

People with certain risk factors should get tested more often. You should get tested at least once a year

How much is an HIV Test?

HIV Testing is FREE of charge

What are the requirements for HIV Test?

Bring along your identity card/ booklet

Can HIV Test detect STI?

No, it cannot.

How long does it take to receive HIV results?

- With a rapid antibody test, usually done with blood from a finger stick or with oral fluid, results are ready in 15 to 20 minutes or less.
- The pre-test counselling, testing, and post-test counselling then take approximately 30 to 37 minutes.

Take me through an HIV Testing process?

- Currently the approved HIV testing algorithm is serial testing.
- Serial testing involves the use of rapid test kit with sensitivity close to 100 % (determine).
- When using determine, and results are negative, they are reported as such and given to the client.
- Second test is done only if the initial test is positive.

What happens after I get my results?

If you are HIV negative, we encourage our clients to remain HIV negative by adhering to the following:

- Abstinence
- Condom use
- Faithfulness
- If at risk, get PreP

If you are HIV positive, we encourage our clients to consent to Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) Treatment.



The Critical Role Of TB Preventive Therapy In The Fight Against Tuberculosis



By Jerry Thabeng, Senior Technical Officer (Care & Treatment)

People Living with HIV (PLHIV) have propensity to develop opportunistic infections due to HIV related immunosuppression, of which TB disease is one of them. Under-five children are similarly vulnerable to developing TB disease when exposed to a bacteriologically positive person, commonly a close family member, due to their under-developed immune system.

It is in the backdrop of these increased vulnerabilities that the National Health System has adopted the implementation of TB prophylaxis Therapy which seeks to reduce the chances of developing TB disease for these high-risk individuals.

Action of TB Preventive Therapy

The drugs used for TB prevention therapy prevent TB by delaying the TB disease progression once a person is exposed to TB bacterium which essentially gains entry through respiratory pathway (Inhaling TB droplets).

They also reduce the likelihood of developing a more severe form of TB disease, this effectively means that one will not develop active TB disease upon direct exposure to TB and if it happens that they do, they will not develop a more debilitating nature of TB disease.

Duration of TPT

Although traditionally TPT was taken for a more prolonged duration of 6 months in Botswana, the national health system has in recent years resorted to a shorter and more convenient duration of only 12 weeks wherein a client is given once weekly doses over a period of up to 3 months.

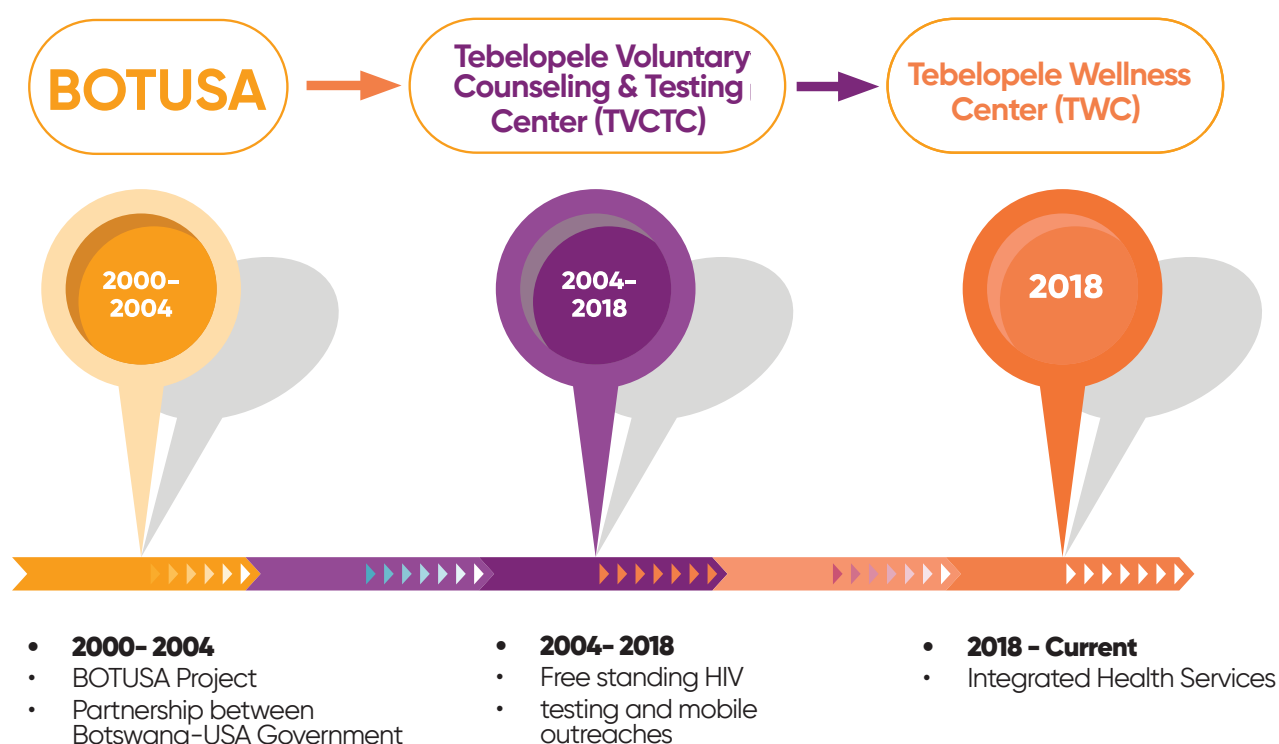
The drug which is currently used for adults is called 3HP which refers to fixed doses of Isoniazid(H) and Rifapentine(P), and Isoniazid only for eligible children less than 12 years.

Who is eligible for TPT

Subject to other additional clinical considerations eligibility includes PLHIV, with CD4 cell count of more than 200 cells, with normal liver function tests, and no previous use of TPT in 2 years. It is also given to asymptomatic children under 5 years of age irrespective of HIV status that are contacts of bacteriologically confirmed TB cases, as well as HIV infected children aged 6-12 years that are similarly bacteriologically exposed.

25 Years Of Impact

We're gearing up for a **major celebration** at Tebelopele Wellness Center as we mark a historic milestone—our **Silver Jubilee!** This year, we proudly celebrate **25 years of dedicated service and impact.**

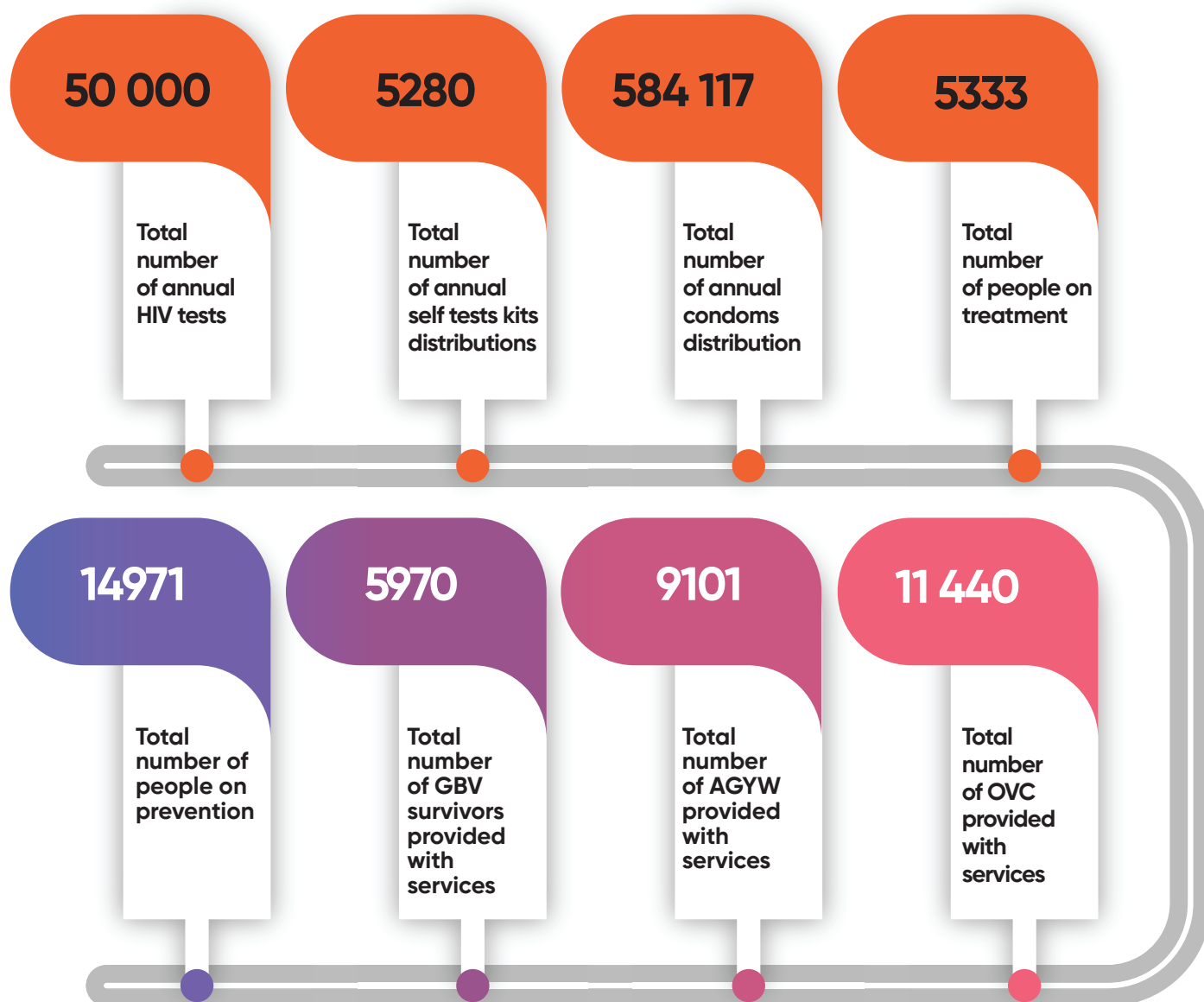


Join us as we honour our journey, reflect on our achievements, and look ahead to a healthier future for all.

Stay tuned for more event details

For partnership and support: ngwatok@tebelopele.org.bw

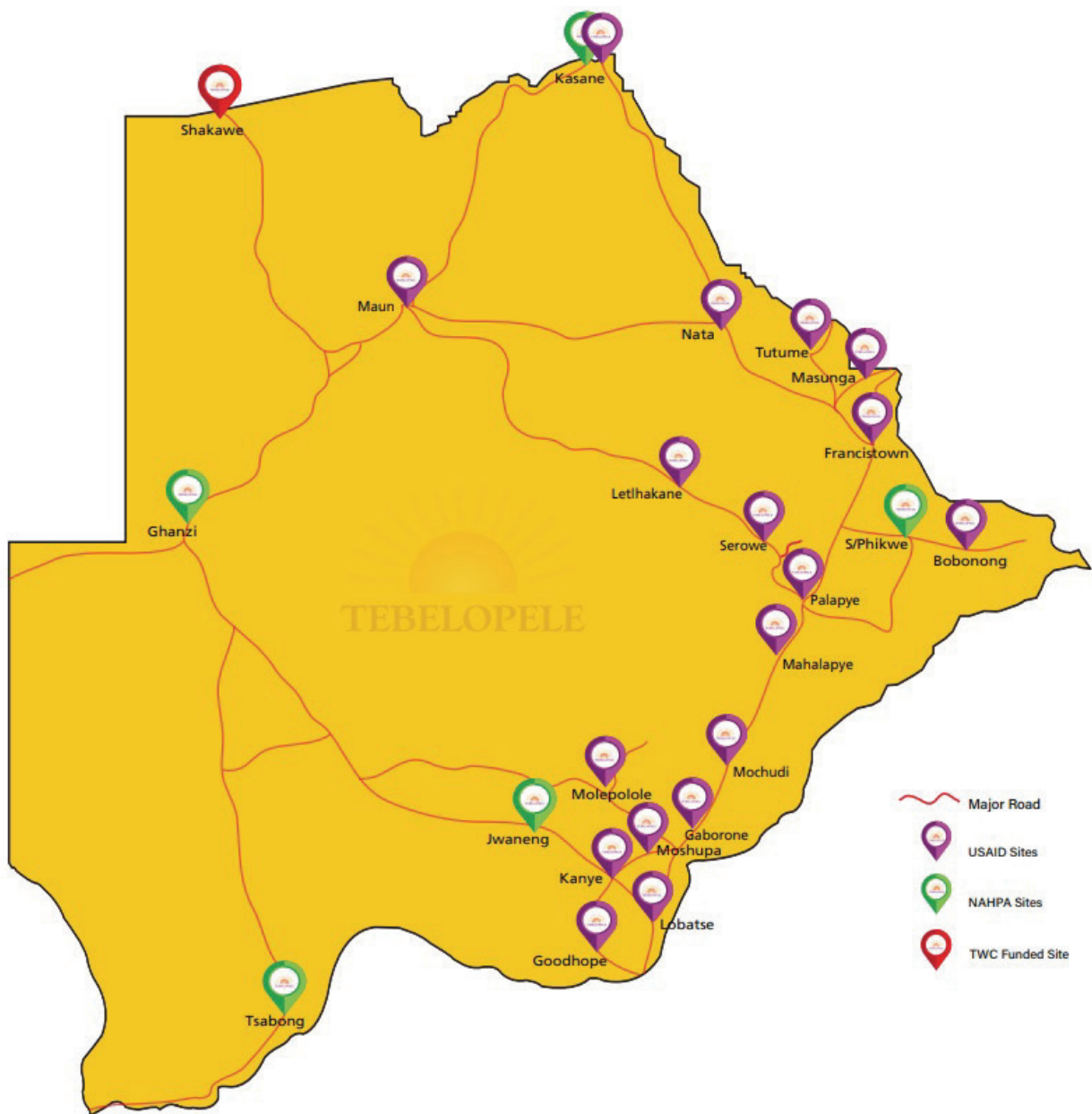
Our Reach And Impact



TebeloPeLe Through The Lens



Tebelopele Sites On Map





Wellness for All, Then, Now, Always

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