

The fight against HIV slows down

By NJABULO NGCOBO

IT IS dangerous that most people now don't see Aids as the big health threat that it is. Some are worried because funding is vanishing as governments' priorities change.

This warning came from the 20th International Aids Conference held in Melbourne, Australia recently.

Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia, director and head of the Higher Education and Training HIV/Aids programme, who attended the conference said: "Speakers were saying that Aids is another disease of the poor, the criminal and marginalised – another form of the global unwillingness to face poverty and inequality. Funding is drying up and the voices urging action are quiet."

But Dr Ahluwalia said some good news included a study published in *The Lancet* that found that there were some 29 million people worldwide living with HIV in 2013 and not 35 million as the United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids (Unaids) estimated. Also, there were 1,8 million new infections compared to 1,3 million deaths – underlining the point that the fight is improving but not over.

A more realistic approach is "ninety is now the new zero". Unaids now focuses on 90% of people with HIV being aware of their status, 90% of people being on treatment, 90% of those on treatment with lasting viral suppression by 2020.

New information will be unveiled at the the South African Aids conference to be held next year and ahead of the 2016 International Aids Conference. The 2016 Aids conference agenda will include:

- Adolescents need help. Deaths among 12 to 18-year olds increased by 50% between 2005 and 2012. Researchers said that cash grants, school-feeding programmes and social support can reduce HIV risk behaviour by half in adolescent boys and girls.
- Women using injectable hormonal contraceptives are at greater risk of contracting HIV but are they informed of this before they choose birth control methods?
- More broadly, a greater focus on women as a group is needed. As it was put: gender-based violence, inequality and a lack of legal protection fuels HIV transmission among this highly vulnerable group.
- Alarming statistics about forced sterilisation of women around the world call for campaigns to stop this extreme violation of basic human rights.