Treatment Accompaniment Internship

Treatment Support for Homeless Individuals and People Who Use Drugs Durban-South Africa

Organizational Overview

Advance Access & Delivery was founded in 2015 to address barriers to high quality healthcare in solidarity with economically and socially marginalized groups. AA&D serves the Secretariat of the Zero TB Initiative (ZTBI), a global coalition of public and private stakeholders, health care providers, civil society groups, and policy makers to implement comprehensive strategies to eliminate tuberculosis (TB), the world’s deadliest infectious killer of adults that killed 1.4 million people in 2019. AA&D has active projects in six countries globally and has offices in the United States and South Africa. Its founding board members hold academic appointments at Harvard Medical School and Duke University’s Sanford School of Public Policy. AA&D’s leadership has extensive research, clinical, and implementation experience in Peru, Lesotho, South Africa, Mexico, India, and Russia working alongside civil society and public sector partners to design and implement programmes that deliver treatment and support to vulnerable communities in low resource settings. From supporting the treatment of tuberculosis globally (a disease which remains the number one infectious killer of adults despite having a cure since 1948), to pioneering models for community-based diagnosis of diabetes, to co-running Durban’s first harm reduction centre, AA&D is making investments in designing models of care that recognize the importance of linking the public and private sectors, that optimize treatment outcomes, and that recognize health as a human right.

Disease burden overview:
In 2018 the WHO estimated South Africa’s Tuberculosis incidence to be roughly 520 TB cases per 100,000, or 360,000 new cases, including 14,000 with drug resistance. Within South Africa, the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal has the highest burden of both TB and HIV. The epicenter of TB in KZN eThekwini Municipality, home to the country’s fourth largest city, Durban where AA&D South Africa has their head office. TB incidence in eThekwini is estimated at 916 cases per 100,000, and the city hosts the highest burden of drug-resistant (DR) TB within KZN. Along with heightened incidence of TB, eThekwini has a higher prevalence of DR-TB as a share of overall cases than the national average. One of the largest drivers of TB in eThekwini is the prevalence of HIV. KZN Department of Health estimates comorbidity at 70%, although it is even higher among vulnerable groups such as Durban’s large homeless population. Homelessness and TB overlap significantly in Durban, with local NGO Ikhaya Lami counting 3,933 individuals living in shelters and on the streets of Durban’s city center, finding 64% of shelter residents testing positive for TB, and 77% testing positive for HIV.
Not only are homeless and street-living individuals at increased risk of contracting TB, but they face heightened prospects of treatment failure due to their living situation and little social support. Economic downturns and high rates of unemployment have forced much of the city’s population into difficult living situations, where the risk of TB and other diseases is increased. For those seeking care, COVID-19 presents new challenges around transportation, food security, access to medications and peer support.

**Brief overview of AA&D’s work with homeless and people who use drugs in Durban**

The Bellhaven Harm Reduction Centre was established in June 2021 as the country shifted from Covid-19 lockdown level 4 to Covid-19 lockdow level 3. Bellhaven Harm Reduction Centre has its roots in a medical withdrawal management programme that was established in two of the homeless lockdown safe spaces during lockdown level 5 and 4. The aim of the programme during lockdown was to assist people going through opioid withdrawal by providing methadone. Underpinning this was concern for protecting the human rights of homeless people who use drugs as well, as a concern for ways to ensure adherence to the lockdown regulations while supporting proper management of withdrawals for these vulnerable groups. The positive outcomes of this programme led to the eThekwini Municipality dedicating one of its buildings, Bellhaven Memorial, to the withdrawal management team with the intent of establishing a dedicated harm reduction centre. This centre is jointly managed by AA&D SA’s Executive Director, Michael Wilson and by the Head of the Urban Futures Centre at DUT, Dr. Monique Marks.

In addition to a daily methadone programme that is accessed by 200 people, AA&D also oversees a Treatment Accompaniment Programme from Bellhaven which supports roughly 35 individuals who are taking TB treatment or HIV medications. This treatment support includes a peer supporter who delivers medications to patients living on the streets.

**AA&D South Africa is seeking a student intern to lead the development of the project below.**

*Document AA&D’s Patient Accompaniment Programme.* The Treatment Accompaniment Intern will be responsible for documenting the existing framework that AA&D SA is using to enroll patients into its treatment accompaniment programme and will produce a 8-10 page programme plan including Standard Operating Procedures that captures a brief history of the programme and how it was developed, how participants have been recruited, and a description of programme activities and the roles of each key members of the accompaniment team including external stakeholders, and treatment and quality of life indicators.
To complete this deliverable, the Treatment Accompaniment intern will conduct telephone interviews with key members of the programme team including the program manager, AA&D’s Director, the Peer Supporter, and the Nurse Supervisor to ensure all activities and inputs are documented in the plan. This plan should include photographs of the various activities, role players, and should also include quotes from stakeholders and programme team members.

This plan will be useful to AA&D SA for two reasons in particular: 1) AA&D intends to scale this programme up in the near future, and a concise programme plan will facilitate scaling operations as well as for fundraising purposes, and 2) For AA&D’s partners in South Africa and around the world, this description of a successful treatment accompaniment program and the inputs required to deliver this program may be a helpful tool to inform the development of similar supportive programs for vulnerable urban communities.

Additionally, the Intern may choose one of the two following opportunities below to accomplish in addition to the above.

**Interview Guide to understand barriers to treatment adherence among homeless individuals.** The Treatment Accompaniment intern will support AA&D SA’s team to develop a qualitative research instrument that will be used to conduct in depth one-on-one interviews with homeless individuals who have defaulted on TB treatment or ARVs to better understand the barriers they face in staying on treatment. This exercise will be conducted in collaboration with the team from the Bellhaven Harm Reduction Centre, under ethics approval from Durban University of Technology. This particular exercise has been requested by the Head of TB for the Provincial DoH who has suggested that personal patient narratives need to be captured, particularly for the most vulnerable, as to why they have defaulted on their treatment. The Treatment Accompaniment intern would be asked to support the creation of this guide with support from AA&D SA’s team and will assist in developing the criteria for selecting the participants who will be interviewed and in training the interviewees on the guide.

**Photo Essay of the Accompaniment Programme.** In February, 2021, AA&D SA hired a photographer to document its treatment accompaniment programme, including visiting patients on the streets with the peer supporter. The Treatment Accompaniment Intern will support AA&D SA to develop a photo essay using the photos that have been developed that documents the journey of patients and the role of the various team
members. The Intern would be responsible for helping AA&D to identify opportunities to showcase the photo essay to highlight the importance of person-centered support and meeting patients where they are. It is important to showcase this programme, to draw attention to its utility to ensuring adherence to treatment and improving health outcomes for a very vulnerable population.

The Treatment Accompaniment Intern will report to AA&D SA’s Director Michael Wilson and will work closely with AA&D staff both those in Durban, and those based at our Durham NC office.

Along with developing the above-mentioned materials, the Intern will help to identify additional opportunities to improve our treatment accompaniment programme for homeless individuals and people who use drugs through literature searches and reviewing best practices and have the opportunity to interact with and connect with AA&D’s team, including its Boston-based colleagues across this project and likely others during the internship.

This position is anticipated to start May 24 2021 and last for 8-10 weeks as agreed upon by AA&D and the intern. The Associate is expected to work 20 hours per week, with the possibility of altering these hours as agreed upon. AA&D will pay a rate of $15 USD/hour for this internship.

Contingent on mutual interest and funding availability, this position may be extended and responsibilities may be adjusted based on program needs and Intern’s academic or professional interests.

Requirements:

- Commitment to social justice and the highest standard of health for all.
- Honesty and integrity in the workplace, and a strong commitment to collaboration and collegiality
- Excellent writing and communication skills
- Interest or experience in the philosophy of harm reduction
- Exhibits creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Demonstrates competencies in qualitative and quantitative analysis methodologies
- Ability to work well and maintain professional relationships and a humble attitude with a diverse team and set of partners in both domestic and international settings
- Ability to work in teams and independently

Interested candidates must submit a letter of intent together with a CV to Michael Wilson, MichaelW@aadglobal.org by 5 April. A short interview will be conducted by two AA&D team members and interested candidates.